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Maurice Francis Egan: Writer, Teacher, Diplomat

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MAURICE FRANCIS EGAN:
WRITER, TEACHER, DIPLOMAT

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WRITER, TEACHER, DIPLOMAT

INTRODUCTION

Despite the existence of a large Irish minority in American society for well over a century, it was not until John F. Kennedy's election to the Presidency in November 1960 that most Americans became aware of or interested in the roles their Irish Catholic fellow citizens had played in United States history since they first began to arrive in appreciable numbers in the 1840's. In fact, the subject was not even comprehensively researched until 1963, when William V. Shannon's The American Irish was published. This work was the first major attempt to analyze perceptively the more than one and one-quarter centuries of American social history as it was lived by immigrant Irishmen and their descendants. According to Shannon, although the Irish had succeeded in exerting influence in local government and local events during the decades immediately following the Civil War, as late as 1932 the Irish were no further advanced in national politics than they had been a century before, despite their eagerness and determination to become more involved. With one lonely exception, no Irish American Catholics had been appointed to positions of importance in the executive or judicial branches of the Federal Government prior to Franklin D. Roosevelt's presidency. The most that was given to them was

an occasional diplomatic appointment or second-rank patronage office. "Typical," Shannon stated, "was Maurice Egan, the man of letters whom Theodore Roosevelt named Minister to Denmark in 1907."[1]

Maurice Francis Egan was the author's great-grandfather, and with the opportunities which this relationship gave, it was possible to research further the life and contributions of the man who received special notice in Shannon's book. Egan enjoyed not one but three successful careers -- as a writer, a teacher, and a diplomat for three presidents -- during his seventy-two years. Because of his special talents he was successful in each of these fields despite his membership by birth in America's Irish Catholic community. His rise to fame was unique because he did not shun his minority background; rather he used it as a vehicle to attain his goals, and at the same time, gain acceptance by the White, Anglo-Saxon, Protestant social system which prevailed in the United States during his lifetime. In literature he first published in Catholic periodicals until he made a name for himself and his work was welcomed by secular periodicals; in journalism he was a strong voice in the Catholic press in New York and became known to Richard Watson Gilder, Egan's eventual link to the White House; as a teacher he joined the faculties of the University of Notre Dame and of Catholic University of America and gained renown as a reformer and a man of

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[1]William V. Shannon, The American Irish (New York, 1963), p. 327.

letters. Soon he became a sought-after guest in Washington society. His life was noteworthy in that he turned unfavorable circumstances and social obstacles into avenues for success, thereby setting an example for the other members of the Irish Catholic community in America.

CHAPTER I

EGAN: WRITER AND TEACHER

Egan was born in Philadelphia on May 24, 1852. Except for the information contained in his memoirs, little is known about his parents or early years. Egan said that his father, Maurice Egan, emigrated to Philadelphia from Tipperary in the late 1820's, well before the potato famine drove scores of his countrymen to seek refuge on the North American continent. Maurice Egan's motive for leaving his homeland is a mystery. All that is related to us is that he accompanied a wealthy uncle with whom he soon quarreled and parted ways.[1] Egan's father was an amiable, well-mannered, sympathetic man with a "democratic love of all people," a trait which his son seemed to have inherited.[2] Egan's mother, American-born Margaret MacMullen, was depicted as a beautiful, cultivated and refined woman who, in contrast to her spouse, was preoccupied with social distinctions.[3]

These contrasting personalities of Egan's parents,

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[1]Maurice Francis Egan, Recollections of a Happy Life (New York, 1924), p. 17. Hereafter this work will be cited as Recollections.

[2]Ibid., p. 50.

[3]Ibid., p. 19.

rooted in Irish and European culture and imbued with the vigorous spirit and refinement of early American urban life, had profound effects on the child who arrived in the thirteenth year of their marriage. As his life progressed and his personality developed, it appears that Egan acquired the best attributes of both personalities and used them effectively to facilitate his advancement. If we are to believe Egan, exposure to his father's ways made him a creative thinker, while his mother's measured dignity and conservatism in social matters cultivated in him extremely conventional habits in dress, deportment, and behavior and made him a stickler for adherence to established behavior in etiquette and protocol matters.[4]

Egan's Philadelphia boyhood was spent in a well-supervised, "hot-house environment." Egan enjoyed a small amount of freedom for a while, but it ended abruptly when his mother became a Roman Catholic. Intensely devoted to her new religion, Margaret Egan believed her son should be brought up in surroundings that would permit him to develop a similar deep faith. Her method was to guard him, almost fanatically at times, from every possible threat to his religious development. She exercised such rigid control over every aspect of his life in her zealousness to imbue him with an intense religious fervor that Egan concluded that his "business in life was to be a martyr."[5] She chose all of his activities,

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[4] Ibid., p. 41.

[5] Ibid., p. 39.

each of his companions, and his first school -- St. Phillip's Parochial School -- with the development of his faith foremost in her mind. Even his reading material did not escape her scrutiny. Instead of fairy tales and other children's stories, which Egan probably would have preferred, she entertained him with readings from her favorite classics.[6]

Several of these efforts had beneficial side effects. Mrs. Egan's readings cultivated Egan's interest in good literature and kindled in him a desire to be a writer himself, a desire which was to be the foundation of one successful career and lead to the others. The selection of St. Phillip's school proved to be fortunate, too. Egan's contact there with a tough gang of Irish stevedores' sons tended to offset the effects of his overly protected home life. Generally, Mrs. Egan's efforts failed to accomplish her primary goal. In fact, they had somewhat of an opposite effect. Egan developed a maverick spirit in thought, though not in deed, eventually reacting against her religious views. In his later years in particular, he became quite critical of the typical Irish-Catholic conservative beliefs and practices prevailing in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century Roman Catholic Church in the United States. (His reaction and criticism were never quite intense enough to cause him to break his religious ties, however; he remained a practicing Catholic throughout his life.)

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[6]Ibid., p. 47.

English composition was Egan's best academic subject, both at St. Phillip's and at La Salle College, where he attended high school as well as college. At La Salle, however, Egan found that his talent was not always recognized. One teacher gave him a low grade because he thought Egan's work was too good to have been original. Infuriated by the grade, Egan challenged the instructor to cite the work from which Egan had supposedly plagiarized. The instructor could not. To prove he was capable, Egan suggested that he be locked in a room for an hour and allowed to write. The teacher admitted his mistake when Egan emerged with a worthy composition.[7]

A few pieces of Egan's were published while he was young, but his first literary success came at seventeen when Appleton's Journal accepted his essay "On Roses." Though a mere synthesis of other texts, it gained Egan a considerable amount of recognition in Catholic literary circles.

After he completed his formal education, Egan was privately tutored for a time. Then to please his father, he began to study law in the office of Philadelphia attorney John I. Rogers. But law did not really appeal to him and a literary career remained his chief ambition.[8] So strong, in fact, was his urge to continue writing that even while studying law he earned spending money by acting as the "London, Paris, and Rome correspondent" of a local paper, "the

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[7] Ibid., pp. 53-55.

[8] Ibid., p. 40.

Sunday Globe." When the paper went bankrupt, Egan's father was horrified to hear his son confess in court, to become a preferred creditor, that he had been such a versatile correspondent.[9] Besides his "foreign dispatches" during this period, Egan also wrote a novel which was published in Henry Peterson's Saturday Evening Post, the first of a great many contributions to that magazine, and three sonnets which were accepted by Scribner's. Despite his literary diversions, Egan worked hard to fulfill his father's desires that he become a lawyer. Eventually though, he dropped law altogether to return to school.

In 1873, Egan, now twenty-one, went to Georgetown College in Washington, D.C., for graduate study. In return for room and board, he also taught several courses, the merit of which he later questioned. It was during this period that he had his first real taste of politics. He became aware, too, of the Capital's diplomatic circle, meeting socially many of the diplomats with whom he would later come into contact officially.[10] Despite these diversions, Egan's four years at Georgetown were restless ones. Finally in 1877 he left the school to travel to the southwestern United States to investigate the estate of his maternal granduncle Don Juan MacMullen, who as one of the early Texas empresarios had started several colonies of Irishmen there in the early nine-

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[9] Ibid., p. 58.

[10] Ibid., pp. 57-60.

teenth century. During the trip Egan continued his writing, periodically sending vignettes about his journey to various eastern papers.[11]

The journey had a profound and lasting effect on Egan's life. It was at this time, during the many hours the trip gave him to reflect about his future, that Egan decided to pursue a literary career and was prompted to accept an offer to edit McGee's Weekly, a Catholic magazine based in New York City. Egan was also moved to accept the position by a second consideration. It would give him the opportunity to live in cosmopolitan New York, the nation's literary capital. Having tasted a cosmopolitan environment while in Washington, D.C., Egan was most anxious to avoid returning to and settling in a relatively provincial city like Philadelphia.[12]

Egan's modest reputation as a writer and poet had preceded him and he was well received in New York. Plunging immediately into the work of editing McGee's Weekly, he was so busy from April 1878 to March 1879 that he had little time for other literary activity. Egan learned newspaper work quickly, and soon James A. McGee, the paper's proprietor, turned over most of the work to him.[13] The absence of a copyright law allowed Egan to "spice-up" the heretofore drab paper by lifting articles bodily from other publications and

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[11] Ibid., pp. 91-93.

[12] Ibid., pp. 94-98.

[13] Ibid., pp. 109-110.

by inventing clever captions for the pictures he pilfered. In his Recollections he brushed aside the fact that several times he erred and his captions did not come remotely near to describing accurately the illustrations they accompanied. But Egan was rightfully proud that during his editorship McGee's Weekly became one of the more important Roman Catholic diocesan journals in the United States.[14]

Because he felt overworked and unappreciated, Egan resigned in March 1879 and returned temporarily to Philadelphia. He went back to New York in December 1879 to become assistant editor of Patrick V. Hickey's Catholic Review. This periodical was an innovator in the field of Catholic journalism because it did not direct itself to the Irish Catholic elements in American society and was not involved in political and theological polemics. Egan attempted to liberalize the publication further, but despite his progressive attitudes toward publishing, Hickey balked at any attempts to change the journal's editorial policies. Egan believed the editor had "secluded himself within a Chinese wall, the portals of which were guarded by the honourable members of the ecclesiastical hierarchy in Ireland."[15]

Continued disagreement with Hickey compelled Egan to leave the Review in January 1881 to become associate editor

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[14]Frank Luther Mott, History of American Magazines, Vol. III (Cambridge, 1938), p. 69.

[15]Recollections, p. 118.

of the Freeman's Journal, the foremost Catholic paper in New York.[16] The decision proved to be a fortunate one for Egan's literary development. His journalistic experience grew considerably at the Journal, and it was probably under the Journal's redoubtable editor and part owner, James A. McMaster,[17] that Egan developed fully his talent for literary criticism which was to put him in great demand as a book reviewer in later years. Egan's unquenchable sense of humor and his adaptability were invaluable assets to him while working on the Journal. The firey McMaster, whose invective was as bitter as his unlimited vocabulary could make it,[18] spared no one who differed with him, making daily work under him an often frustrating experience.

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[16] Mott, History of American Magazines, Vol. IV (Cambridge, 1957), p. 247.

[17] Thomas F. Meehan, "James A. McMaster," The Catholic Encyclopedia, Vol. IV (New York, 1910), p. 506. Meehan described McMaster as follows: Although sound on fundamental issues and principles, his primary weakness was fault finding. In politics he was a States' Rights Democrat and anti-abolitionist who took a very active and influential part in the great national controversies which raged before the Civil War. His editorial assaults on Lincoln during the War caused him to be imprisoned at Fort Lafayette for eleven months as a disloyal citizen. The Freeman's Journal was suppressed by the government and did not resume publication until April 19, 1862. McMaster then adopted a milder tone in politics but in everything else his old style remained. But with the advent of modern newspaper methods and the decline of personal journalism a new generation with new ideals tired of McMaster's literary violence and his once widespread prestige and influence waned. The whims and idiosyncracies of the old man, who grew more and more difficult to manage as the end of his curious and stormy career drew to a close, still cramped and hampered the paper.

[18] Ibid.

McMaster died in December 1886, and Egan became the sole editor of the Freeman's Journal until September 1888, when he left its staff to assume a teaching position at the University of Notre Dame. The paper's editorial policies changed little under Egan's editorship. Egan continued the paper's firm support for President Grover Cleveland, a support which was so strong, in fact, that in 1884 the paper had backed Cleveland's bid for the presidency even though most of its Irish Catholic readers were expected to vote for Blaine because of his strong ties with their community. Egan, for instance, resolutely stood behind the Democratic President in the furor which developed when Cleveland attempted to return captured Confederate battle flags to several southern states. He published an editorial supporting the President's position and a complimentary letter from a Union veteran who was himself seeking to return three Confederate battle flags to veterans of Pickett's division at a Gettysburg Battle commemoration ceremony.[19] During the early months of Cleveland's unsuccessful 1888 campaign, Egan attempted to sway public opinion in favor of Cleveland, the incumbent President, by publishing numerous pro-Cleveland articles and editorials as well as a statement by Cleveland's mother-in-law refuting the much publicized charge that the President beat his young wife.[20] Cleveland

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[19] Freeman's Journal, June 25, 1887, p. 4. I am indebted to Mr. Sean Timothy Murphy for all citations from this periodical.

[20] Ibid., June 9, 1888, p. 4.

was so impressed by this support that he wrote a complimentary letter to Egan in an effort to insure continuation of Egan's and the paper's backing. Egan had already left for Notre Dame by the time the letter was dispatched, however, and was unable to give the President the pledge he sought, though in his reply Egan did offer to assist the President's campaign in Indiana.[21]

As editor, Egan also continued to focus the Journal's attention on topics involving the Catholic Church and to devote a great deal of its space to news about Ireland, a practice instituted by McMaster to cater to New York's large Irish population. It was during this time that Egan made his few comments on nineteenth century Irish internal politics, a subject he seldom touched on again. In various editorials, Egan indicated he favored the cause of Charles Stewart Parnell and the Irish Home Rule movement. Representative of his views were his comments prompted by the infamous Phoenix Park murders, May 6, 1882: "No excuse can be made for the intolerable tyranny and oppression which left up to the Irish only one weapon, that of conspiracy."[22] Egan also took swipes at the English whenever possible to please the paper's Irish-American readership. One of the better examples of his anti-British sarcasm was written when he learned of a sermon in which an Episcopalian minister in New York extolled Queen

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[21] Recollections, pp. 181-182.

[22] Freeman's Journal, July 21, 1888; July 28, 1888.

Victoria as a model for all womankind. "Is it really true," Egan retorted editorially in the Journal, "that domestic virtue is such a rarity among us that we should all grovel in abject, idiotic admiration at the feet of this fat, selfish and ugly old woman, because, for all we know to the contrary, she has never broken the Sixth Commandment?"[23]

Egan's decision to leave the Journal in the fall of 1888 and take a teaching post at Notre Dame was motivated by his desire to perfect his legitimate literary skills, especially his prose writing. Egan's nine years in New York City had not been devoted entirely to journalism. Even though newspaper work was the craft which provided his living, Egan still managed to find time for the more respected literary pursuits. When he first arrived in New York, for instance, Egan joined the literary circle led by Richard Watson Gilder, assistant editor of Scribner's.[24] (Egan's entree to this group was provided by Scribner's publication of several of his sonnets some years earlier.) Gradually, Egan became fully accepted as a regular member of Gilder's literary circle, where he met and became friendly with such renowned

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[23]Ibid., July 2, 1887, p. 4.

[24]It was Gilder who in later years, as editor of the Century Magazine, successor to Scribner's, made that publication the leading literary journal in the country. It was also Gilder, who as the friend and confidant of Grover Cleveland, was Egan's link with the White House in the years of the Cleveland administrations. It was also Gilder who introduced Egan to Theodore Roosevelt in 1901. Recollections, pp. 106, 114.

authors of the day as William Dean Howells, Henry James, and Brander Matthews. Egan continued to have his work published by Scribner's and then by Century. Gradually, his literary stature grew and he branched out, contributing extensively to the North American Review, Harper's Magazine, and the New York Times book review columns as well as to numerous Catholic periodicals and, occasionally, to Charles Dana's New York Sun.[25] He wrote so prolifically during these hectic years between 1881 and 1888, in fact, that at his peak he averaged 10,000 to 15,000 words a week on widely diversified subjects.[26]

Egan's literary efforts were not restricted solely to articles, essays, and book reviews. He tried poetry and the novel as well. His first volume of poems in particular showed promise but after several years and several new publications of his verse, Egan had still not completely fulfilled the critics' original expectations. According to Critic Walter Lecky, Egan published too quickly to take sufficient time to polish and perfect his work. Moreover, Egan had the misfortune to be a pioneer in American Catholic literature. His poems appealed primarily to a distinct class and failed to attract proper critical attention, so he was unable to obtain the type of criticism he needed to improve his work. With some bitterness, Lecky saw the position Egan was in. "The

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[25]Recollections, p. 114. Dana said of Egan and William Dean Howells that they were "the only Americans who wrote a good English style!"

[26]Ibid., p. 157.

class to which Mr. Egan belongs has no criticism to offer . . . ," he wrote. "If an author's book sells, his name is blazoned forth in half a hundred headless petty journals. His most glaring defects become through their glasses mystic beauty spots . . . . A clique grows around him, whose duty is to puff the master. It is such reasons as these that have limited the scope and dwarfed the really fine genius of Maurice Egan."[27] Egan, too, saw that the American Catholic literature of the 1880's was "anaemic," but it is doubtful whether he realized that he himself was a victim of its diseased state, especially since he had attained some success with his shorter poems, notably his sonnets. In these works, Egan's scope was broader and his touch more firm; here existed the mastery of musical expression which was lacking in his longer poems. Even the critical Lecky acknowledged, in 1895, that Egan was "at the head of the younger American school of poets."[28]

While Egan's poetry was romantic and idealistic, his novels treated topics that were wholly realistic and they exemplify the trends which were shaping American literature, especially the American novel, during these years. Egan's novels dealt mostly with Irish-American -- but not always Catholic -- life. Generally, they were set against backgrounds of drab, everyday surroundings and filled with mi-

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[27]Walter Lecky, Down at Caxton's (Baltimore, 1895), pp. 60-61.

[28]Ibid., p. 62.

nutely detailed real-life characters through whose lives Egan protested the evils of the times. Egan's novels, characteristic of the works of social protest which became prevalent in the 1890's, bear out Commager's statement, in The American Mind, that "the whole panel of lesser novelists of the Roosevelt-Wilson era, however they differed in background and training, united with Howells and Herrick and Churchill in pronouncing a verdict of guilty against American business and businessmen of this generation."[29]

Throughout his New York years, Egan, unfortunately, wrote under great pressures: the pressure of conflicting obligations to employer and family,[30] and the pressure of his many and varied literary interests and pursuits. He was so active as a poet, novelist, essayist, and book reviewer, in addition to making his living as a journalist, that he was unable to achieve complete mastery in any of these literary forms though he was an adequate, often entertaining novelist and prominent among the minor poets of his day.[31] He simply never worked long enough in any one particular literary craft to develop the skill which can be obtained only from constant,

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[29]Henry Steele Commager, The American Mind (New Haven, 1950), pp. 257-258. Actually, Egan condemned the economic system most vociferously and joined the ranks of what Commager called the "Literature of Revolt" chiefly in his later novels, especially The Ivy Hedge (1914), which abounds with characters caught up in the social issues of the day.

[30]Egan had married Katharine Mullin of Philadelphia in September 1880.

[31]Lecky, op. cit., pp. 54-56.

devoted, often arduous practice. He did not have the time necessary to do so, even though he possessed the desire. It is easy to understand, then, why the Notre Dame offer was so attractive to him -- with its salary increase and leisure time for writing.

Life at South Bend was exactly what Egan had hoped for. His income was adequate for small-town living and his position as professor of English literature gave him the time he needed to write.[32] Furthermore, he gained personal satisfaction from the direction he was able to give the University as it sought to liberalize and broaden its curriculum.[33] In the classroom he was left entirely free to teach as he desired, so much so that he felt that perhaps he had been "spoiled by the kindly opinion that whatever he did was sure to be right."[34]

Teaching at Catholic University, to which Egan transferred in 1896, was quite a contrast. The "academic" freedom which permeated Notre Dame did not exist at this institution, which had served exclusively for the education of priests until 1889 when its school of philosophy was first

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[32]The bulk of Egan's novels and textbooks were written during this decade at Notre Dame. Some of the titles follow: Disappearance of John Longworthy (Notre Dame, 1891); First Steps in the Sciences, with Object Lessons, translation and adaptation of Paul Bert (New York, 1888); How They Worked Their Way, and Other Tales: Stories of Duty (New York, 1892); Success of Patrick Desmond (Notre Dame, 1893); A Gentleman (New York, 1893); A Marriage of Reason (Baltimore, 1893).

[33]Recollections, pp. 156-157.

[34]Ibid., p. 185.

opened to laymen. Instead, its conservative faculty and administration were bound to stuffy academic traditions dictated by the beliefs of the Church. The school had actively sought Egan for its staff because he was a prominent, well-qualified Catholic and it would hire no one but a member of the Church. Egan had not particularly wanted the job. He had been quite happy at South Bend and was not anxious to return to Washington, which he believed was a poor place to raise children. But Mrs. Egan pressed for the change because she longed to return to Washington's cosmopolitan way of life, and Egan finally gave in and accepted a post as one of the college's two professors of English.[35]

Regrettably, strong undercurrents of conflict between old and new philosophies of education existed at Catholic University at this time, and Egan gradually became disenchanted with the conservative leadership of the school. Increasingly, he sought outside literary contacts and interests even though his lectures demanded a great deal of preparation. He served as a correspondent for a London weekly paper and contributed frequently to various literary magazines. Requests for his articles and stories increased greatly after the successful publication in Century of a collection of short stories called The Wiles of Sexton Maginnis, which satirized the Irish-Catholic viewpoint of various current subjects.[36]

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[35] Ibid., pp. 177-180, 185.

[36] The stories were popular and in 1909 they were published in book form.

Egan's outside activities, however, were not restricted to literary interests while he taught at Catholic University. Two old college friends, William F. Harriety, chairman of the Democratic National Committee in 1896, and Senator Thomas Carter of Montana, chairman of the Republican National Committee in 1892, sparked his interest in politics, and while he was still on the Catholic University faculty, Egan embarked on his third and most prestigious career as, in Theodore Roosevelt's words, "unofficial adviser to . . . three presidents . . . ."[37]

Egan's "unofficial" relationship with the Presidency had actually begun during Cleveland's second administration. In 1893, while Egan was still at Notre Dame, Cleveland offered him a diplomatic assignment in Athens. Egan turned down the position, but the offer of a diplomatic post at some future time was left open to him for the asking.[38]

Senator Thomas Carter was Egan's link to the White House after Egan returned to Washington in 1896. A good friend and occasional adviser of McKinley, Carter would often bring McKinley's problems to Egan for suggestions and advice. Immediately after they conferred with each other, Carter would usually meet with the President. Topics discussed were most often concerned with developments of law in foreign countries,

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[37] Recollections, pp. 192-193.

[38] Ibid., pp. 181-182. It was undoubtedly Richard Watson Gilder who brought Egan's name to Cleveland's attention. See Note 24.

a topic on which Egan could give the foreign viewpoint because of his journalistic contacts in Rome and in France. The question of the Philippines was widely debated during the McKinley administration and several conferences were held between Egan and Carter on the subject of the friars' lands in those islands.[39] McKinley even suggested that Egan go unofficially to Rome to assess the entire situation and see what adjustments of the religious difficulties in the Philippines were possible. Carter mentioned that as a reward Egan might be sent to Quirinal as ambassador or made minister to the Vatican if such a position ever evolved. Egan declined outright, however, stating that he had no ambitions whatso-

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[39]James A. LeRoy, Americans in the Philippines, Vol. II (New York, 1914), p. 304. Under its Constitution, the United States Government could not succeed to the position of the King of Spain as "royal patron of religion" within the domains subject to him and could not exercise in the Philippines the right of appointment to benefices or the control of Church property any more than it could pay for the support of the institutions of the Church. But there were many thorny questions involved in the decision as to where the title to some of this property had been vested and should be vested in the future. All this was apart from the practically more urgent question whether the legal principle of "prescription" would apply in any and all the cases of landed estates claimed by the religious orders. Furthermore, there might prove to be merit in the contentions of many Filipinos that valid titles could not be shown for a part of the land included within these estates. Moreover, there were additional legal questions as to whether, even if the friars had good titles, by prescription or otherwise, their alleged transfers of the lands to foreign corporations in 1898, 1899, and 1900 were valid. Finally, there was a practical issue of fact as to whether or not their transfers were fictitious and designed to facilitate the collection of rents and enjoyment of other profits from these lands, of which the former landlords had virtually been deprived since 1896.

ever for a diplomatic career.[40]

With Theodore Roosevelt's accession to the Presidency, Egan became more closely associated with the White House. The two men had first become acquainted in the 1880's, when Roosevelt, through correspondence, asked Egan to criticize several of his writings. The two men found that they had many common literary likes and dislikes. They never met personally, however, until Richard Watson Gilder introduced them after Roosevelt had become President.[41] Their friendship grew much closer when Robert Lincoln O'Brien of the Ladies Home Journal was unable to continue writing a series of "interpretations" of Roosevelt for that magazine. The President asked Egan to finish the articles, which necessitated several weekly visits by Egan to the White House. After the weekly sessions were over, Egan continued to be a frequent luncheon companion of Roosevelt's, discussing with the President various aspects of literature or one of the President's own recent writings.[42]

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[40]Graham H. Stuart, American Diplomatic and Consular Practice (New York, 1952), p. 133. See also Recollections, pp. 182-197, 199. During this period, although he does not mention it in his Recollections, Egan must have had some direct contact with President McKinley, if only socially, for in the McKinley Papers there are occasional letters inviting Egan to various White House functions. I am indebted to Professor Richard B. Sherman for these citations from the William McKinley Papers, Library of Congress, Vol. 132, George M. Cortelyou to Maurice F. Egan, January 10, 1900.

[41]Maurice Francis Egan, "Theodore Roosevelt in Retrospect," The Atlantic Monthly (May 1919), pp. 676-685.

[42]Recollections, pp. 204-205, 208.

Like his predecessor, Roosevelt wanted the opinion of a Catholic layman on the Philippine problem. Roosevelt found such a great divergence of opinions among Catholic ecclesiastics that he wanted counsel from another source. The legal difficulties concerning the friars' lands, above and beyond the religious ones, were, however, much more complicated than Egan's simple and naive proposed solution indicated. Egan advised the President to submit the problem to the Pope and to abide by his decision.[43]

Despite such questionable advice, a warm relationship continued to grow between the two men, and in 1906 Roosevelt appointed Egan as a member of the Indian Commission as a gesture of friendship.[44] Since this was only an honorary committee, Egan believed that his acceptance of the post would not violate his desire to remain aloof from politics, a desire so strong that he had turned down two offers of diplomatic posts by former administrations because of it. Egan considered the diplomatic corps to be a group of underpaid, overworked public servants whose livelihoods were on the firing line with every presidential election and he wanted no part of such an existence. But in June 1907, the ambassadorship to Japan became vacant, and T.J. O'Brien, the United States Minister to Denmark, was transferred to the position.

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[43] Ibid., pp. 201-202.

[44] It is unclear why their relationship developed. The one plausible explanation was their mutual interest in literature.

Roosevelt, wishing to fill the vacancy in Denmark with "a man who knew equally well the traditions of the old world and the practices of the new," asked Egan to accept the post. When Egan refused, Roosevelt gave him an ultimatum. "I am going down to my little house in Virginia for about a week," the President said. "When I return I expect you to say yes, and I will send you to Copenhagen."[45]

The decision was difficult for Egan. Besides his desire to stay out of governmental service, he had come to enjoy living in Washington and was reluctant to leave the country. Furthermore, his wife did not relish the idea of such a great change. But Roosevelt's offer came at a time when Egan was dissatisfied with his work at Catholic University and had already decided to resign from the faculty. Egan wanted more time to write, but the extensive preparations required for his classes made this impossible. He had no assistants, despite his need for help, especially the aid of a philologist trained in Old English. Egan's dissatisfaction had been further augmented by the school's financial position. Recent financial reverses had forced the Catholic University trustees to pursue stern economic measures, which were reflected in Egan's salary and overloaded work schedule. Roosevelt's offer of a diplomatic post in Copenhagen, in contrast, presented the opportunity for a greater salary, more congenial surroundings, travel, added professional and social prestige, and greater

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[45]Recollections, pp. 197-198, 206, 217.

leisure time for writing -- all the things in life which Egan desired.[46] So, Egan decided to accept the Copenhagen post where he would spend the next ten years, ingratiate himself with the Danish people, and become the "Prince Charming of the Diplomatic Corps."[47]

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[46] Ibid., pp. 217-218.

[47] Henry Van Dyke, "Introduction," Recollections, p. x.

CHAPTER II

EGAN: THE DIPLOMAT

Egan's appointment was welcomed by many prominent Americans. In a letter to the New York Times, Richard Watson Gilder, well-known literary figure, expressed the feelings of many of them: "President Roosevelt, in sending Dr. Maurice F. Egan as our Minister to Denmark, not only selects for that post a scholar and writer of genius and one highly competent for his new position, but thereby gives pleasure to an unusually wide circle of acquaintances and friends of the new Minister . . . ." Gilder praised Egan as "a keen-minded student and teacher of literature, a delightful story writer, and writer of exquisite verse," who had endeared himself "to many personally for his wit, his geniality, and the loyalty of his friendship."[1]

Although a non-career diplomat, Egan was well qualified for the numerous duties of his ministerial post. Somewhat of a linguist, he was fluent in French, capable of simple conversation in Italian, and had a reading knowledge of German, although he knew no Danish. He had gained much practical experience in the intricacies of public relations while

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[1] New York Times, June 1, 1907. No mention of the Danish reaction to Egan's appointment was made in the New York Times. English translations of Danish sources are unavailable.

working as a newspaper editor and he could adapt to new surroundings. This ability to accept change so easily was humorously described by Roosevelt's secretary as "plasticity" and by the President as "that defect of your qualities . . . [which] will help you very much as a diplomatist -- you will soon be sufficiently Danish to make them understand you, and still sufficiently American to keep that steel rod which answers for a back-bone in a perpendicular position."[2] Besides possessing "great personal charm,"[3] Egan was known for his witty conversation and was able at a moment's notice to tell a wonderful story on practically any topic. Present-day faculty members at the University of Notre Dame still remember him. He always "was expected to tell a good story and . . . no one bothered whether he told the exact truth or not."[4] For several years, "President Roosevelt . . . had admired his unfailing tact . . ." and ability to handle people which seemed to make him a natural for the diplomatic field.[5] The one personal limitation Egan had was his pocketbook. In the

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[2] Recollections, p. 219.

[3] Charles Callan Tansill, The Purchase of the Danish West Indies (Baltimore, 1936), p. 454.

[4] Letter from Reverend Thomas T. McAvoy, C.S.C., University of Notre Dame Archivist, June 16, 1965. Egan never lost this ability and after retiring from public life would amuse his grandchildren during his visits to their summer cottage at Mountain Lake Park, Maryland, by making up stories in which the children themselves were characters. Interview with Egan's daughter-in-law, Mrs. Gerald Egan, Washington, D.C., April 1965.

[5] Tansill, op. cit., p. 454.

early 1900's, the United States diplomatic corps was generally composed of wealthy men with independent incomes. Egan knew he would encounter many problems because the position's $10,000 annual salary was inadequate.[6] He believed he would be able to supplement the salary by royalties, especially from the sale of his school books. So convinced was he that this additional income together with his salary would be sufficient, that he refused financial aid offered to him by his wealthier friends.[7]

The most important issue facing the new minister when he arrived on August 27, 1907, was the United States' desire to acquire the Danish West Indies. Negotiations had first opened in 1867, but after the failure of the most recent attempt in 1902, the prospect seemed unpromising. Neither President Roosevelt nor Senator Henry Cabot Lodge expected him to complete the purchase, but they did seem to think that he "was the best man to pave the way!"[8]

Before tackling that problem Egan first had to dispel the popular Danish notion that Americans were blatant imperialists opposed to things cultural and devoted to the pursuit of material ends -- a viewpoint created by the boorish free-spending American tourists who frequented Denmark.[9]

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[6]Out of this salary he was to rent, furnish, and staff the Legation in Copenhagen in addition to financing the official entertainment.

[7]Recollections, pp. 220-221.

[8]Ibid., p. 218.

[9]Tansill, op. cit., p. 457.

Egan was confident that he could rise above this stereotype for several reasons. He had a reputation as a man of letters, which made him quite acceptable to the Danish press.[10] He had come from Washington, which the Danes considered to be a city of culture, and he was not rich, so the Danes could not assume that he had purchased his post with campaign contributions.[11] Furthermore, Egan did not regard himself as a political appointee like most of the non-career diplomats of his day. As he emphasized in his Recollections, Egan went to Denmark because Roosevelt insisted that he was needed and well qualified for the job. He did not regard his appointment as a "pay-off" or display of cronyism, even though to all outward appearances the opposite seemed true. Roosevelt's precise motivations for the appointment will never be known, but his close friendship with Egan and, especially, Egan's Irish Catholic background were undoubtedly prime considerations.[12] Roosevelt took great pride in the fact that his appointees included men of almost all religions and backgrounds.[13] Egan's personal qualifications certainly figured

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[10]Historian Tansill called him "an eminent scholar in the field of English literature." op. cit., p. 454.

[11]Maurice Francis Egan, Ten Years Near the German Frontier (New York, 1919), p. 66. Hereafter this work will be cited as Ten Years.

[12]William Shannon had another opinion and believed Egan was appointed to the post "in reward for his service as an unofficial contact with the Catholic hierarchy on Church-State problems in the Philippines and elsewhere." The American Irish, p. 328.

[13]John Morton Blum, The Republican Roosevelt (New York, 1962), p. 37.

in Roosevelt's decision, too. As Tansill notes in his definitive study of the Danish West Indies purchase, "if a diplomat was really needed at Copenhagen there was little doubt that Dr. Egan could rise to the occasion."[14] Roosevelt, who frequently made political appointments, was nevertheless "irked by shirkers and incompetents and those unduly impressed with pomp and social status."[15]

Even though Egan "had always looked on the American diplomatic service as unworthy of serious consideration," once he arrived in Copenhagen he faced his new duties with great enthusiasm.[16] As soon as he was settled in his post, he began to learn Danish and through intensive study and the help of a tutor he quickly became fluent in the language. He demonstrated his ability to the Danes by translating a Danish lyric into English, an act which made him quite popular and increased the prestige of the United States. Egan then immersed himself in Danish life to avoid the common American failing of judging foreigners by American standards.[17] He developed a strong admiration for the Danes' "elegant simplicity" and their devotion to the arts.[18] He applied all his ingenuity to publicizing the United States and promoting

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[14]Tansill, op. cit., p. 454.

[15]Howard K. Beale, Theodore Roosevelt and the Rise of America to World Power (New York, 1962), pp. 25-26.

[16]Recollections, p. 220.

[17]Ten Years, p. 67.

[18]Ibid., p. 198.

a climate of understanding and respect between the two countries. His efforts to win the favor of the people met with great success. According to Dr. Henry Goddard Leach, noted authority on Scandinavian civilization, "his [Egan's] graciousness and generousity became almost folklore in Denmark, and the Danes loved his humor."[19]

Egan's early ministerial work consisted primarily of furnishing congressmen with reports on various sociological and economic questions. During this time he also developed a system of protocol -- one which Egan said "saved us from embarrassing mistakes; . . . It was generally concluded that, for Americans, we were amazingly correct!"[20] Indeed, etiquette and protocol were his fortes. He had always been "devoted to all kinds of ceremonials."[21] He was a stickler for proper dress and even while teaching at Notre Dame had been asked to deliver a series of lectures on manners and eti-

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[19]Henry Goddard Leach, My Last Seventy Years (New York, 1956), p. 115. Dr. Leach (A.B., Princeton, 1903; A.M., Harvard, 1906; Ph.D., Harvard, 1908), has an extensive background in Scandinavian studies. He served as the curator of Scandinavian history and literature at Harvard University from 1921 to 1931 and was professor of Scandinavian civilization at the University of Kansas for several years after he assumed the post in 1947. He was also secretary of the American Scandinavian Foundation from 1912 to 1921 and president of that organization from 1926 to 1947. He first became acquainted with Egan while studying in Denmark from 1910 to 1912 as a Harvard travelling fellow. Dr. Leach has written several books on various aspects of Scandinavian civilization and is the recipient of five honorary degrees and numerous decorations, many from the Scandinavian nations. Who's Who in America, Vol. 35, 1968-1969 (Chicago, 1968), p. 1290.

[20]Recollections, p. 236.

[21]Ibid., p. 248.

quette.[22] Whether at a royal dinner, a formal reception, or at a simple diplomatic exchange, Egan always felt at ease. In fact, the more formal and demanding the occasion, the more he relished it. President Roosevelt would have hesitated to appoint him if he had not been equipped to handle the social obligations so important in the life of a successful diplomat.

Egan had not been in Denmark long when he became concerned with Germany's apparent efforts to make Denmark a German sphere of influence.[23] Almost everywhere, Egan found evidence of German attempts to dominate Danish life. One of the tactics Egan observed was the German attempt to condition the Danes to identify all cultural achievement with Germany. Egan believed that the Germans were overwhelming the Danes with liberal exports of the best German literature, art, science, and music. The Danes were highly vulnerable to such German cultural influences. Like the rest of Scandinavia, Denmark was small and possessed a distinctive language. Then, as now, Danish authors had to publish in a major language if they hoped to reach a wide audience. Germany took full ad-

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[22]The lectures were later published under the title A Gentleman (New York, 1893). Some of the chapter titles were: "Letter Writing"; "Rules of Etiquette"; and "What Does Not Make a Gentleman".

[23]Although Egan's own book Ten Years Near the German Frontier is the only published monograph on this subject, his findings have been confirmed, if only in sketchy terms, by C. Fritiof Ander in The Building of Modern Sweden (Rock Island, Illinois, 1958), pp. 5, 15, and by T.K. Derry in A Short History of Norway (London, 1957), pp. 213-215.

vantage of this situation and willingly provided the necessary services to "friendly critics."[24]

Much to Egan's chagrin, the German efforts appeared to be succeeding, despite the Danes' natural fear and distrust of Germany as a result of the Schleswig-Holstein conquest. Egan became convinced that to counteract this growth of German influence he had to launch a campaign of his own to promote a favorable image of and create sympathy for the United States; in his own words, his "first duty . . . [as] a diplomatist . . . [was] to make propaganda."[25] Egan became an active supporter of exchange programs between Denmark and the United States. Preliminary work along this line had already been done by Dr. Nicholas Murray Butler of Columbia University, who, like Egan, had hoped to offset some of the Germans' propaganda efforts with the exchange of professors, lecturers, and students. Through Butler's endeavor Professor Otto Jespersen, a philologist from the University of Copenhagen, visited the United States. In return Butler, Dr. Schofield of Harvard, and Dr. Gore of George Washington University, all eminent scholars, lectured in Denmark.[26] Egan's background as a scholar and writer gave him a natural appreciation for such programs of cultural exchange and also assured him a respectful hearing in Danish intellectual circles. He

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[24]Ten Years, pp. 141-148.

[25]Ibid.

[26]Ibid., pp. 142-143.

also participated in this cultural program by undertaking lecture tours in the Danish provinces[27] and by contributing several poems on Danish themes to some of the leading United States magazines, including the Century Magazine and Scribner's.[28]

The Danes took particular note of Egan when in 1908 he was elected a member of the National Institute of Arts and Letters. In 1911 he gained even more prestige when he took time off from his diplomatic duties to deliver a series of lectures at Johns Hopkins.[29] He gave similar talks at Harvard in 1914.[30] In 1911 he was also chosen to be the representative of Georgetown University at the centenary of the Royal Frederick University in Christiania, Norway, where he was picked as the dean of the representatives from the western hemisphere.[31]

Egan was pleased by all these honors. But perhaps his

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[27]Egan found that he learned more about "the attitude of the Danish mind" during these tours than he did during the hundreds of formal dinners he gave and attended. Ten Years, p. 150.

[28]See, for instance, Egan, "Swimmer at Elsinore," Scribner's, LVI (September, 1914), p. 406, and "Danish Castle," Century Magazine, LXXIX (November, 1909), p. 116.

[29]See New York Times, May 13, 1911.

[30]See New York Times, April 9, 1914, and Recollections, p. 288.

[31]This honor, while impressive to the Danes, is not very important when compared with Egan's other accomplishments. In selecting its representative, Georgetown would have wanted to have curbed expenses as well as selected a worthy man. Egan was a renowned scholar, a Georgetown graduate, and a resident of Scandinavia. He was the obvious choice.

greatest pleasure at this time came when a Danish publishing house asked him to draw up a list of American books suitable for translation and publication in Denmark. American literature was virtually unknown in pre-World War I Denmark, but Egan's efforts to counteract German propaganda and to publicize the United States had paid off. Because of his efforts the Danes finally began to realize that America possessed more than a rude frontier culture, and Egan was satisfied that the United States finally commanded the respect in Danish intellectual circles that he believed it should.

In economic areas Egan confronted more difficult problems. He believed that United States tariff laws were flying in the face of all his efforts to improve Danish-American relations. Two particular instances of high tariffs caused Egan a great deal of embarrassment. At Amager, an island near the city of Copenhagen, the descendants of the early Dutch settlers grew the finest cabbage and cauliflower in Europe. Since the farmers were anxious to market their cabbage in the United States, it was important both to them and to the Scandinavian-American Line, the shippers, that the cabbage enter the United States with as little duty as possible. Unfortunately, Egan complained, "Our legislators did not think so; the tariff on the inoffensive cabbages was put so high that export ceased."[32] The second economic source of embarrassment for Egan was that of Royal Danish Porcelain.

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[32]Recollections, p. 262.

Although one of the typical products of Copenhagen it had never been commercialized. No matter what the temptation, factory managers did not lower the quality of their artistic product. Egan knew that the porcelain did not really compete with any similar product in the United States, but the import taxes placed upon it were almost prohibitive. To Egan it seemed "useless to talk of friendly feeling toward a small country when its limited products were barred . . . ."[33] Egan attempted to use his influence to have the tariff on the Amager produce and the tariff on Danish porcelain reduced so that Denmark could sell these goods on the American market. In return Egan tried to get the Danes to accept a patent convention with the United States. He failed in both instances.[34]

In January 1911, Andrew Carnegie, the steel magnate, made an offer to the Danish Government, through Egan, to establish a "Hero Fund" similar to ones already established in the United States, Canada, Newfoundland, Britain, France, and Germany. The fund was designed to support the wives and families of men killed while performing some act of heroism in peacetime or to support the hero himself during his disability, should he have been injured. In his letter to the King of Denmark, Carnegie outlined the principles of the Fund, gave some examples, and suggested that Egan be made vice-president of the Fund in Denmark.[35] Egan doubtlessly appreciated the

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[33]Ibid.

[34]Ibid.

[35]Andrew Carnegie to the King of Denmark, March 24, 1911. Copy of original letter on loan to author from Mrs. John Cramer, Egan's granddaughter.

opportunity to be of service to this worthy cause, but it made great demands on his valuable time. He was besieged with requests for aid and a considerable amount of his activity was spent in "Hero Fund" administrative work. However upsetting Carnegie's gift was to Egan's routine, it did provide another avenue for upgrading Danish-American relations.

Even better opportunities for increasing American prestige in Denmark during Egan's early years at his post were presented by the visits to Copenhagen of several notable Americans: Dr. Frederick A. Cook, the Arctic explorer; former President Roosevelt; Booker T. Washington, the Negro educator and founder of Tuskegee Institute; and the officers and men of a division of the U.S. Navy's Atlantic Fleet.

Dr. Cook's arrival in Copenhagen on September 4, 1909, began a well-publicized, but embarrassing week for Egan. "I am afraid I received the news of his [Cook's] coming rather indifferently," he later wrote. "A consul from Greenland came in one afternoon and informed me that the greatest event of the century had occurred. An American had discovered the North Pole!"[36] Egan was wary lest he embarrass the United States Government by a too-hasty acclamation of Cook, but the Danes were unhesitating. The captain of the King's yacht typified the Danish reaction when he said, "America, the

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[36] Recollections, p. 268. Egan added that perhaps his lack of excitement over the discovery was a result of a schoolboy task when he had been "obliged to parse Doctor Kane's Arctic Voyages . . . . I had an unconquerable prejudice against everything in the Arctic Circle."

greatest country in the world, is covered with laurels!"[37]

The Danes had been only too willing to turn aside from the bitter political battle being fought in the Rigsdag over the question of defensive armament against the threat of German aggression. When Cook arrived he directed attention away from politics at a time of tremendous public crisis, and so the people were eager to take him to their hearts. Preparing to welcome the explorer upon his arrival were the Danish Government, the Royal Geographic Society, the Copenhagen City Council, and the Chamber of Commerce. Despite his misgivings, Egan had little choice but to join the welcoming committee.[38]

Egan found Cook to be very simple and straightforward.

> He was bronzed, dressed in ancient clothes, redeemed by a pair of reversible white cuffs and I could not help noticing that his teeth were rather ground down. I asked one of the devoted admirers the reason for this. 'He was obliged to chew walrus hide in the Arctic Circle.' Being hopelessly unscientific, . . . I looked on this proof of having reached the North Pole with awe-struck admiration.[39]

Although still not completely willing to accept Cook's claim on behalf of the United States Government, Egan did try to render him every possible service and still take full advantage of the propaganda possibilities presented to the United States. On September 10 Cook left Copenhagen in triumph, having won the hearts of the people and having received two

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[37] Ibid., p. 269. Danish unreserved enthusiasm was also described by John Hohenberg in Foreign Correspondence: The Great Reporters and Their Times (New York, 1964), p. 195.

[38] Ten Years, p. 47, and Recollections, pp. 268-269.

[39] Recollections, p. 269.

of the Danes' highest awards. Even before he left, however, the famous Cook-Peary controversy had started.[40] While Cook was basking in Danish acclaim, Peary had arrived in Labrador, having come from the North Pole which he had reached on April 6, 1909, and charged Cook with being a fraud. The message Egan received at the Legation, relayed from Peary, stated "I have planted the American flag on the North Pole and Cook has given you a gold brick."[41] A furor arose with Egan and the American Legation in the center. "Denmark and all Scandinavia stuck hard to Cook. Great Britain sneered. King Edward from the beginning had been one of Cook's opponents. Queen Alexandra [Edward's Danish wife] continued to believe in Cook, though she expressed herself as being really happy that the rivalry between the two explorers could not generate international hatred -- they were both Americans."[42] Egan, fortunately, was in the clear. Throughout Cook's stay he had treated him only as a notable American and never judged the validity of his claim. The row in Denmark subsided after Cook's departure. Egan was happy to forget the entire affair.[43]

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[40] Hohenberg, op. cit., pp. 193-199.

[41] Recollections, pp. 270-271.

[42] Ibid., pp. 268-272, and Ten Years, p. 47.

[43] When Cook brazenly returned to Copenhagen in 1915 to lecture, Egan fortunately remained aloof, for a riot nearly broke out in the lecture hall despite the fact that Cook's friends were in the majority. Egan's comment was: "It was a disagreeable experience for an American Minister; but as long as the Government of the United States was not committed to Dr. Cook's claims, and an American had made the discovery, matters were not as bad as they might have been." Recollections, p. 272.

The visit of former President Theodore Roosevelt to Denmark from May 2 to May 4, 1910, was in pleasant contrast. Roosevelt stopped in Denmark on his way to Norway to make his Nobel Prize acceptance speech. According to Egan, the Danes looked on Roosevelt's visit as a great compliment. Before receiving news of the former President's intentions, King Frederick VII had made plans because of ill-health to go to the Riviera. Nonetheless, the King told Egan that he would make all the arrangements for Roosevelt's stay and extend him every courtesy that the country had to offer. "I will do as much for him as if he were an Emperor." The King arranged that Roosevelt and his family be given the Christiansborg Palace during their stay, apartments formerly reserved for such royal visitors as the King of England and the Czar of Russia.[44]

Egan remarked later that "Mr. and Mrs. Roosevelt came; he saw; he conquered; but Mrs. Roosevelt won all hearts." The Danes were particularly impressed with the manner in which the former first lady handled herself in an awkward situation involving her first Danish social function. The Roosevelts' baggage failed to arrive in time for the event, a court dinner given in their honor by the Crown Prince, and they were forced to dine in their traveling clothes. Mrs. Roosevelt accepted the inconvenience so graciously that, according to Egan, she ably dispelled the popular Danish no-

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[44]Ten Years, pp. 199-200.

tion "that American ladies have the plebian habit of 'fussiness'." The Roosevelts continued to impress the Danes during the remainder of their three-day visit. The Crown Prince lauded the former President as "a Man" for years afterward.[45]

Booker T. Washington came to Denmark on a lecture tour in the fall of 1910. Egan greatly admired him and knew that he would receive a warm welcome from the Danish royal family. But he was unsure of the way Washington's visit would be received by southern Americans. Egan was on guard against any offensive remarks which might be made by southern papers and and picked up by the Danish press. To avoid such complications, Egan suggested to King Frederick and Queen Louise that Washington be received informally and in private "so that he would be more at . . . ease."[46] Although concerned for the interests of his visitor, Egan was equally interested in preserving newly created U.S.-Danish rapport. Any outburst of racial hatred such as that following Washington's visit with President Roosevelt at the White House would have destroyed most of the cordial relations Egan had built up. Egan attended Washington's lecture along with "all the Americans . . . [he] could collect." Even though the Negro educator's visit was brief and hurried, Egan was convinced that it helped greatly to dispel the Danish impression "that lynching . . . [was] to the Americans of North America what bullfights are

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[45] Ibid., pp. 200-201.

[46] Ibid., p. 249.

to those of South America."[47]

The next spring, 1911, Egan hosted the Second Battle Division of the United States Navy's Atlantic Fleet when it stopped at Copenhagen on a good will tour. Both officers and enlisted personnel favorably impressed the Danes, who were pleased and flattered by the visit. Egan did his best to entertain the men. His son Gerald even arranged a baseball game between two of the ships' crews, which the Danes enjoyed as much as did the participants. Though Egan considered the visit good for Danish-American relations, it placed a great financial burden on him. The heavy entertainment expenses he incurred still caused him problems four years later.

By 1912 Egan had established his reputation as a successful diplomat. This was acknowledged when President Taft allowed him to remain at his post.[48] The greatest compliment to his abilities came in 1913, however, when Woodrow Wilson was elected President. The Democrats, who were taking control for the first time in sixteen years, were determined to enjoy the spoils of victory. Consequently, the diplomatic service experienced extensive personnel changes, and Egan's position in Copenhagen seemed tenuous. True, he had always protested that he was not a political appointee, but he had been appointed and retained by Republican administrations and enjoyed the support of his friends Theodore Roosevelt and

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[47] Ibid., pp. 249-250.

[48] Taft had written to Egan "You shall remain in your post as long as I remain in mine." Ten Years, p. 111.

Richard Watson Gilder. It was thus somewhat of a surprise to everyone when Wilson asked Egan to remain on in Denmark. The New York Times, commenting about Wilson's actions in its July 9, 1913, edition, pointed out what a "notable exception" Egan's retention was:

> The efforts made in recent years to build up an American diplomatic service in which merit and special training instead of political influence should be considered as the determining factor in bestowing preference will not be counted by the Wilson Administration . . . . Indications are that the Administration intends to make what will amount to almost a clean sweep of the higher grades of the diplomatic service. One notable exception is Dr. Maurice Francis Egan, the Minister to Denmark, a Republican, appointed by President Roosevelt, to whom the post of Ambassador to Austria was offered by President Wilson and declined. It is not likely, however, that any other appointees of a Republican Administration will be treated with such consideration.[49]

The specific reasons motivating Wilson to retain Egan in the Copenhagen post are unclear, but Egan was probably saved by his apolitical background and record as a diplomat. Although the New York Times described Egan as a Republican, he had never clearly identified with any party. He had close friends in both major parties but he never openly discussed politics. This was his habit both before and after his arrival in Denmark. The last public political support he gave was in 1888, when his editorials in the Freeman's Journal supported Cleveland. More important than Egan's politics was the groundwork he had already laid in Copenhagen. Wilson was keenly

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[49] New York Times, July 9, 1913, p. 1.

interested in the Danish West Indies[50] and appreciated Egan's attempts to reopen negotiations for their sale to the United States. Wilson again indicated his respect for Egan's abilities when he offered Egan the post in Vienna. The decision was apparently made for two reasons: it was customary for the United States Government to send a Catholic as ambassador to "the foremost Catholic Court of Europe"; and Egan had high standing as a scholar.[51] Unfortunately, Egan could not afford the expenses of maintaining the Vienna post and was forced to decline.[52] As it turned out, his refusal allowed him to demonstrate his prowess as a diplomat by handling the negotiations leading to the United States' purchase of the Danish West Indies and problems arising out of World War I.

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[50]See Chapter III, p. 61.

[51]New York Times, June 26, 1913, p. 5.

[52]Ibid.

CHAPTER III

THE PURCHASE OF THE DANISH WEST INDIES: "A FIXED IDEA" FULFILLED

The greatest accomplishment of Maurice Francis Egan's career as a diplomat was his handling of United States negotiations for the purchase of the Danish West Indies. He held tenaciously to a "fixed idea" that the islands should be the property of the United States and quietly persisted for almost eleven years to secure the territory for his government.[1]

When he appointed Egan as Minister to Denmark, President Roosevelt was convinced that these islands -- St. Thomas, St. John, St. Croix, and a scattering of small offshore cays -- were important militarily for defense of the proposed Isthmian canal. He expressed his feeling in a letter to Secretary of State John Hay in 1903: "Both the Dutch and the Danish West Indies in America . . . will be a constant temptation to Germany unless or until we take them."[2] Senator Henry Cabot Lodge's argument was similar to Roosevelt's. "So long as the islands are in the market," Lodge wrote, "there is

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[1]Arthur S. Link, Wilson: Campaigns for Progressivism and Peace, 1916-1917 (Princeton, New Jersey, 1965), p. 81.

[2]Theodore Roosevelt to John Hay, Washington, April 22, 1903, quoted in Tyler Dennett, John Hay, from Poetry to Politics (New York, 1933), pp. 387-388.

danger that some European power will purchase them, which would be an infraction of the Monroe Doctrine; and, their military value, as Captain Mahan had pointed out, could hardly be overestimated."[3]

Since Egan had been a frequent visitor at the White House and a popular guest at Washington diplomatic gatherings, he was thoroughly familiar with the views held on this subject by the President and leading members of Congress. He became convinced of the validity of the President's fears regarding the Danish islands within a short time after he arrived in Copenhagen. "I became aware," he recalled in his memoirs, "that Prussianized Germany might at any moment seize that little country, and . . . the Danish West Indies would be German . . . ."[4] The pessimism of the Danes, who seemed to consider subjugation by Germany just a matter of time,[5] strengthened Egan's determination to obtain the islands for the United States. Conditions in 1907, however, were far from ideal for opening such negotiations. Two previous treaties had been killed, one by the United States Senate and the other by the Danish Landsting, the upper house of the Danish Rigsdag. No Danish politician was anxious to risk another attempt to sell the islands even though the blame for both

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[3]Quoted by Dennett, Hay, p. 267.

[4]Ten Years, pp. 54-55, and Recollections, p. 277. By the time of the outbreak of the War, Egan believed Germany had lost interest in the islands, but the United States Government's attitude remained unchanged.

[5]Ten Years, p. 94.

failures could easily be placed on the United States.

The Treaty of 1867 had promised St. Thomas and St. John in return for $7,500,000. Although it had embodied all of the demands of the United States Government, it was killed in the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, "largely through the hostility of Senator Charles Sumner who feared President [Andrew] Johnson would reap credit from the purchase."[6] The more recent treaty in 1902 was disapproved by a single vote in the Danish Landsting. Several influential Danes had opposed the sale because it would have reduced the size and prestige of Denmark. The United States, too, was partially to blame for the treaty's failure because of the small payment it had offered -- only $5,000,000.[7]

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[6]Robert Lansing, "The Drama of the Virgin Islands Purchase," New York Times Magazine (July 19, 1931), p. 4. Also Minister Egan to Secretary of State, No. 444, July 21, 1911, Papers Relating to the Foreign Relations of the United States. Hereafter this compilation will be cited as Foreign Relations Papers.

[7]Beale, Theodore Roosevelt and the Rise of America to World Power, p. 416; Recollections, p. 286; and Ten Years, p. 224. This is also the opinion of Dennett, op. cit., p. 273, who wrote: "Quite possibly, if he [Hay] had been at liberty to proceed with less haste, and if he had been a man to whom a few millions of dollars had seemed of less consequence, Hay might have succeeded."

In Washington at the time, however, it was believed that Germany had been responsible for the failure of the United States to get the islands. John Hay and Henry White were the strongest exponents of this view.

Although Germany at that time was anxious to secure naval stations in the Atlantic and Gulf of Mexico and was interested in the Danish islands for herself, she did not bring any pressure to bear either for or against the sale. The recently published Memoirs of Friedrich von Holstein, who planned and directed German foreign policy from 1890 until 1906, bear this out. They also disprove a theory of Egan's that Germany had no regard for the United States' Monroe Doctrine. Norman

These failures were not Egan's only obstacles -- a fact he discovered to his dismay during his first reception with the Danish Queen. Queen Louise, who was deeply concerned about the plight of the Negroes in the United States, had read Uncle Tom's Cabin and on the basis of it she apparently assumed lynching of Negroes was "the American equivalent of the Spanish bullfight." She feared a similar fate would be-

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Rich and M.H. Fisher, ed., The Holstein Papers, Vol. I, Memoirs and Political Observations (Cambridge, 1955), pp. 177-178.

"The Navy, understandably enough, had constantly in view the acquisition of naval bases and was convinced that the policy of the German Empire should be adapted and subordinated to this special interest . . . . 'It should be the task of a properly directed foreign policy,' said . . . Admiral [von Senden] 'to acquire an island in the Gulf of Mexico without straining our relations with America -- an impossible task at variance with the Monroe Doctrine and the ever-growing awareness in the United States that they are the leading Power in the whole of the American continent. Holleben [Ambassador in Washington, 1897-1903], whose expert opinion was sought on this question, declared that the possible consequences of Germany's gaining a footing near the American coast could not be foreseen. Here again it was the Foreign Ministry which opposed the intention of accepting Denmark's offer . . . of St. Thomas Island, which, though only thirty-two square miles in extent, is of strategic and commercial importance."

An editor's footnote included this excerpt from the Foreign Ministry files. "In January 1900 Tirpitz asked the Foreign Ministry what attitude to take towards a petition from the Pan-German League advocating the purchase by Germany of the Danish Virgin Islands. In view of the fact that the United States was already negotiating with Denmark about the purchase of these islands, the Pan-German League feared difficulties and so it recommended that the United States should be prevented for the time being from purchasing the islands. Then Germany ought to purchase from Denmark the exclusive right to establish harbour installations, coal depots, and cable stations on the islands, so as to gain a footing there. On 16 June the Ambassador in Washington was asked for his opinion. On 30 June he reported that any step which the United States regarded as a violation of the Monroe Doctrine would have incalculable results. The petition from the Pan-German League was not followed up."

fall the West Indian Negroes should they ever come under American control. Egan realized the Queen would not support any United States attempt to purchase the Danish West Indies no matter how attractive the offer. He learned later that many other Danes shared their Queen's concern for the welfare of Negroes under American rule. Their feelings were heightened by the occasional but lurid accounts of lynchings published in American newspapers and quoted by the Danish press.[8]

Such problems convinced Egan that there was no possibility of opening negotiations for several years, but he persisted in keeping the thought alive by discussing it informally. Throughout his memoirs he repeated that to him buying the islands was "a fixed idea" and he liked to talk about it.[9] He kept a close watch on all factors -- economic, political, diplomatic, and social -- which would affect a future sale and, simultaneously, he tried to sustain State Department interest in the matter. In a steady flow of reports he discussed the Danish Government and its problems, pertinent views of influential Danish political and economic groups, and conditions in the islands themselves.

Throughout the Taft administration Danish public opinion continued to be anti-sale. The aristocracy and large landholders, who as hereditary landlords opposed parting with any territory, feared a breakup of Denmark's possessions abroad would signal the lower classes to force a breakup and

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[8] Ten Years, p. 247, and Recollections, p. 230.

[9] Ten Years, p. 224.

distribution of their vast landed estates at home. Since they exercised considerable power in the Landsting, their active opposition was a serious problem. The small farmers and the commercial classes tended to favor the sale but their views did not carry the same weight in the Rigsdag. Most Danes were indifferent to the whole idea of selling the islands, being more concerned about "low taxes and good prices for butter, milk, and the cattle they exported."[10] This indifference, which aided opponents of the sale, had an opposite effect on the islands themselves. They were completely neglected. The Danish Government viewed the islanders as "amiable black children who were to be indulged in their idiosyncracies, and in no way managed or coerced."[11] Several attempts had been made to change these conditions. At one point a lottery was organized to obtain financial support for the territory, but the proceeds were totally insufficient. The majority of all similar plans were equally unsuccessful.

Danish businessmen could see the potential that the territory had as a commercial maritime base. Aware of the value of the splendid harbor of St. Thomas alone, some promoters appealed to the Danish Government for funds to begin a development project, but no action was taken on their request.[12] Even the influence wielded by such businessmen as the Admiral

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[10] Foreign Relations Papers, Egan to P.C. Knox, Secretary of State, no No., Copenhagen, August 9, 1909.

[11] Recollections, p. 287.

[12] Ibid.

de Richelieu, a director of the vast Scandinavian-American Line and a close friend of Egan's, had little effect. The Danish Government steadfastly paid little heed to suggestions that the lands could and should be managed as a business. Egan's reports were filled with similar illustrations of Denmark's neglect of her Caribbean colonial possessions.

Many of Egan's 1909 dispatches concerned the Danish Government's finances. Although improved over the previous year, Denmark's economy was unsteady. Many businessmen were living on credit extended chiefly by Germany.[13] Additionally, Denmark had problems with Iceland and her monopoly in Greenland. The Danish Foreign Minister called his government's finances "deplorable" but he told Egan that Denmark would not consider selling the Danish West Indies to the United States. "Neither [political] party," he confided to Egan, "would like to see the money from the Islands put into the hands of the opposing influence."[14] Despite such political obstacles, Egan continually encouraged the Department of State to be cordial to Denmark. United States influence was increasing, especially because Denmark approved the treatment accorded Cuba and the Philippines. Even the suspicious Danish landowners favorably viewed the United States' action in those territories.

By 1910 Egan's reports were more encouraging. They re-

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[13] Foreign Relations Papers, Egan to Secretary of State, no No., Copenhagen, April 17, 1909.

[14] Ibid.

flected a gradual transformation of Danish views toward America. The King and the traditional conservatives still did not favor selling the islands, but an important government official told Egan that the King would not actively oppose a a majority in the Rigsdag, nor would the conservatives try to block the sale, if Denmark gained enough commercial advantages from such a treaty.[15]

As Egan observed this mellowing of opposition, he sought to press his cause from another angle. He was fully aware of Danish feeling that the country had already lost too much territory. He thought a bargain could be worked out if some quid pro quo was found to appease the pride of the patriotic Danes. Believing that he had found such a solution, Egan in September 1910 wrote to Huntington Wilson, Assistant Secretary of State. He promised to send "a very important and very audacious suggestion" which "would mean, if carried into effect, the acquisition on our part of both Greenland and the Danish West Indies." Egan explained that the report he would send on September 23 was a synthesis of suggestions made to him by influential Danes and not to be taken lightly.[16] In brief, his proposal called for:

(1) Denmark to give Greenland to the United States.

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[15] Foreign Relations Papers, Egan to Secretary of State, No. 367, Copenhagen, December 6, 1910. Secretary Knox answered this report and asked that the Department be kept fully informed. Secretary of State Knox to Egan, No. 111, Washington, January 25, 1911.

[16] Foreign Relations Papers, Egan to Assistant Secretary of State, no No., Copenhagen, September 20, 1910.

(2) The United States in return to give Denmark the southern group of the Philippines, consisting of the Islands of Mindinao, Palauan, and the small islands south of these.
(3) Denmark to then surrender these islands to Germany.
(4) Germany in return to give back to Denmark the northern part of Schleswig.

With such a trade Egan believed that the Danes would be so delighted with the return of their beloved province of Schleswig that they would be willing to sell the Danish West Indies to their benefactor, the United States.[17]

The diplomatic significance that such a transaction would have had for the United States and Germany was more important than the bartering of the real estate involved. Egan's thinking was based upon his own interpretation of the Far East situation. This analysis, completely his own work,[18] was founded on his conviction that "there remains only one great European power whose interest in East Asia runs parallel with those [sic] of America, and that is Germany." Germany and the United States, both industrial nations with rapidly expanding populations, desired to preserve the "open door" in China. After 1907, Russia altered her foreign policy. Her

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[17] Foreign Relations Papers, Egan to Assistant Secretary of State, no No., Copenhagen, September 23, 1910. On loan to the author from Mrs. John Cramer was a draft of this letter dated September 19, 1910.

A copy of this plan was resubmitted by Egan to the Department of State in 1915. Foreign Relations Papers, The Lansing Papers, 1914-1920, 2 Vols. (Washington, 1939-1940), II, Egan to Secretary of State, No. 833, Copenhagen, March 8, 1915. See also Charles Callan Tansill, The Purchase of the Danish West Indies (Baltimore, 1932), p. 460.

[18] Foreign Relations Papers, Egan to Assistant Secretary of State, no No., Copenhagen, September 20, 1910.

aim then seemed "to be in conjunction with Japan, and . . . later with China, to try to monopolize the political, financial, and mercantile affairs of the Far East." Egan believed that France would soon find its position in the Far East an impossible one since she lacked both the surplus population and the qualities necessary for a permanent colonial empire. Thus, he predicted, "the ancient . . . kingdoms in the East, which France . . . despoiled and oppressed through greater force and superior armament, will one day rise against her . . . and they will be backed by a continent." Egan believed England was also in a difficult position. By her support of Japan in the Russo-Japanese War she had "helped to raise the yellow race from its long lethargy and made it aware of its own power, and she now stands perplexed and amazed at the results she . . . helped to achieve. The yellow spectre is out of the box, and . . . it now threatens to turn against its liberators and supporters." What then about the role of the United States in this area of the world? Despite the expense, Egan believed the United States necessarily had to maintain the Hawaiian Islands and the Philippines in order to retain her power status in the Pacific and protect her vital commercial interests in eastern Asia. America needed Germany's friendship and support, but Egan felt this could be gained by ceding to her the southern islands of the Philippine group. Such a transfer would make Germany a United States partner and enable the two countries to work together to preserve the "open door" and to guard against the rising "Yellow Peril."

With a permanent possession in the East, Germany could then afford to return Kiao Chou to China, a gesture, Egan reasoned, that would help win the friendship of the Chinese and guard against the day when a more powerful China might decide not to renew Germany's annual lease, thus leaving the United States without an ally in the Far East.[19]

In view of the boldness of his proposal, Egan, whether to preserve his "diplomatic neck" or to be diplomatically polite, included the following statement in his dispatch:

> You may ask whether I consider this proposition feasible or not. I can only answer that I have been so much engaged in discovering what is really in men's minds over here that I have become, perhaps, a little too concentrated to take that broad view which is a habit with you, who are constantly facing many great questions, and therefore, it would be unreasonable for me to make an answer that would imply a larger experience than I have.[20]

Egan's audacious plan, which embodied a completely new Far East foreign policy for the United States, not to mention the effect it would have on United States diplomatic relations with Europe, must have left Secretary of State Knox speechless. There is no answer to it in the published Foreign Relations Papers.

Egan's memoirs do not indicate whether he felt thwarted in his first attempts at creative diplomacy, but his next report to the State Department, in December 1910, made no mention of the contents of the September messages.[21] If his

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[19] Ibid.

[20] Ibid.

[21] See Note 15.

pride had been injured, he successfully hid his wounds.

Progress toward opening sale negotiations stagnated for the following seven months. Then on July 21, 1911, Egan reported that the Danish Minister of Foreign Affairs had told him that the Danish Government would make no proposition to the United States concerning the Danish West Indies "unless public sentiment is expressed very strongly." Egan immediately set out to rouse just such sentiment, chiefly with the help of the radical Danish press, with which he had always enjoyed much rapport.[22] It is an interesting coincidence that shortly thereafter several Danish newspapers took up the cause of the sale of the Danish West Indies. An article in København, a conservative anti-sale paper, highlighted the controversy that followed:

> In certain radical and social-democratic circles, there has of late been carried on an agitation with the view of again bringing the question of the sale of the West Indian Islands into the order of the day, and that attempts are being made in these circles to create a feeling favorable to the sale of the islands and partly by belittling the value of the work which has already been done for improvement of the islands and the future possibilities for the islands which will be opened up by the completion of the Panama Canal . . . . But we can fortunately add that the agitation, no matter how cunningly it has been arranged, has not gained and will not gain a foothold outside of radical and social-democratic circles.[23]

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[22] Foreign Relations Papers, Egan to Secretary of State, No. 444, Copenhagen, July 21, 1911.

[23] Foreign Relations Papers, Egan to Secretary of State, No. 478, Copenhagen, November 15, 1911. The article from København was from the November 11, 1911, issue and was accompanied by a translation. Egan also enclosed a clipping from the August 6, 1911, edition of Copenhagen's Social-Demokraten, a liberal Danish paper.

At this time the potential impact that the completed Panama Canal would have on the prosperity of the Danish West Indies became a chief topic in every discussion about the islands. Egan's report of November 15, 1911, contained references to a conversation he had had with the Minister of Foreign Affairs which touched on this impact. Although vague on details, the Minister said that he had once been in favor of selling the territory to the United States because it was unprofitable and would be difficult to defend in wartime. But lately his views had changed. Now, he believed conditions should improve in the islands. The industrial outlook was better [because of the canal] and the Danish Government was doing its best to deepen the Danish harbor on St. Thomas. The rest of their conversation according to Egan was verbal sparring that was interesting because in it Egan contradicted the plan he had proposed just a year earlier.

> I said I understood that Danish national pride was the main thing that stood in the way of parting with these islands, and naturally we Americans, who were sometimes sentimental ourselves, sympathized with this . . . . [But] I said I was surprised that there still existed Danes who imagined that the West India Islands could be traded to Germany for Shleswig [sic]. Schleswig, as I had good reason to know, prefers to remain German, even if such a project were not absolutely impossible.[24]

Since it would have been useless to pursue the purchase issue further while the Danes were waiting to see how the Panama Canal would affect the islands, Egan wisely decided to be

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[24]Foreign Relations Papers, Egan to Secretary of State, No. 476, Copenhagen, November 14, 1911.

as cooperative as possible and bided his time. Aside from a communication to the State Department on the subject in May 1913, he did not mention the matter again for almost two years. Finally, in March 1915, he concluded that the time was right at last to approach the Danish Government about selling the islands. War had come to Europe, and Denmark, although neutral, was badly in need of money. The government had greatly overextended itself financially because of its numerous social welfare programs: its pledge to better the lot of the poor; its advancement of funds to small farmers; its support of a farmers cooperative banking system; its old age pensions and unemployment insurance; and numerous other social programs. It also supported an army the size of the regular army in the United States before the War. Consequently, Denmark could ill-afford to use national income to pay any of the islands' operating expenses.[25]

In view of Denmark's economic situation, Egan wrote to the Secretary of State on March 8, 1915:

> It may seem out of place for me, especially when the most terrible events are making a crisis in the world, to return to a subject on which in the past I have written many dispatches -- the purchase of the Danish Antilles. For seven years I have hoped that the Department might instruct me to make such suggestions to the Danish Government as would lead to an offer of these islands to the United States at a reasonable price. For good reason, I am sure, I received little encouragement.[26]

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[25] Ten Years, p. 260

[26] The Lansing Papers, II, Egan to Secretary of State, No. 833, Copenhagen, March 8, 1915.

After this introduction, Egan gave an account of his past efforts to secure the islands. He undoubtedly felt, and probably with good reason, that this history lesson was necessary to introduce Secretary of State William Jennings Bryan to the basic facts of the case.[27] After outlining the plan he had submitted in September 1910, Egan pointed out that if the United States offered a high price for the territory, Danish pride over losing her colonial possessions could be soothed. He also told how he appealed to Danish pride when trying to sway opponents of the sale:

> . . . if they [the islands] were to remain a burden to Denmark and a blot on the face of progress, as they were, it would be much better for the national reputation of Denmark that they should be sold to the United States. This attitude was looked upon as reasonable.

Egan concluded his report by saying, "I have been impressed by the fact that the State Department, not withstanding its present arduous and grievous occupation, has kept its eyes fastened on probable contingencies which may result from the present war, and I take the liberty of calling attention to one of these possible contingencies . . . . If Germany were to

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[27] Writing later of a trip he made to Washington in the spring of 1914 and of his conversation with Secretary Bryan, Egan recalled, "I was touched by the benevolence, the charity, and the extreme ignorance of this man of genius . . . . Mr. Bryan did not seem to be really aware that I had come from Europe at all. I seemed to be looked on as a political appointee, who had dropped from somewhere into a circle of white-souled charity and religious beauty." Recollections, p. 296.

gain control over Denmark, the Danish West India Islands would then be the property of Germany."[28]

Despite its somewhat impassioned tone, Egan's appeal fell on deaf ears. Fortunately for Egan, however, Bryan's State Department career was brief, and his successor, Robert Lansing, was interested in United States acquisition of the islands. Shortly after becoming Secretary of State ad interim on June 9, 1915, Lansing raised the question of the purchase with President Wilson. After reading Egan's dispatches, which up to this time had probably been neatly filed without a second glance, Wilson commented to Lansing, "I have read these papers through with close attention, and thank you for handing them to me. As I said to you yesterday, I am, and have long been, deeply interested in the purchase of the Danish West Indies. I hope that you will take the matter up seriously and that it may be possible to have a concrete proposal, if possible in the form of a treaty, to lay before the Senate at its next session."[29]

Wilson's interest in the Danish West Indies was surprising. He had never revealed his feelings to Egan, nor had he ever suggested to any of his key administration officials that the issue should be actively pursued. As during the Taft administration, government personnel seemed completely disinter-

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[28] The Lansing Papers, II, Egan to Secretary of State, No. 833, Copenhagen, March 8, 1915. See also Chapter III, Note 41.

[29] The Lansing Papers, II, W.W. to R. Lansing, June 16, 1915.

ested in the subject during the early years of Wilson's presidency. Egan felt as though he had been working in a vacuum since no administration official had ever commented on his efforts and he "had no . . . instructions . . . and very little information as to what was going on in the minds of his countrymen as to the expediency of the purchase."[30] Ultimately, if it had not been for Egan's persistence, as Arthur Link noted in his study of Wilson, the project would not have been kept alive.[31]

Egan finally received the encouragement he had been seeking for so long on June 16, 1915, when Lansing sent a telegram which said that the plan Egan had suggested in his dispatch of March 8, 1915, was "desirable and may be feasible." Lansing then advised Egan to approach the proper officials "very discreetly" to ascertain whether a purchase offer by the United States would be accepted.[32]

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[30] Ten Years, pp. 257-258.

[31] Link, op. cit., p. 81.

[32] The Lansing Papers, II, Lansing to Egan, Tel. No. 27, Washington, June 16, 1915. For some reason Egan seems to have acted with extreme caution in carrying out the Secretary's instructions to approach the proper officials. Perhaps it was because he had been pursuing the goal for so long that he wanted to prepare the ground before he approached Foreign Minister Scavenius, or perhaps Scavenius was just not available. It was summer and many of the wealthy residents of Copenhagen had left for their country estates. Egan himself was at Aalholm, the principal castle of Count Raben-Levetzau, when he received a telephone message informing him of the long-desired directive to reopen the island question (Ten Years, pp. 264-266). Egan gives a fascinating account of the opening stages of the negotiations but he seems to be more storyteller than historian and telescopes the events of six months into one vivid conversation.

Egan's first interview after receiving these instructions was with Christian Helweg-Larsen, Governor of the Danish West Indies, who was visiting in Denmark. Helweg-Larsen emphasized from the beginning of the conversation that he was against selling the islands. Denmark had already lost so much territory, the Governor believed, "that the surrender of any more would be a blow to the national prestige." Egan strongly suspected that the Governor's attitude was influenced by a personal financial interest in the harbor development project on St. Thomas Island, since Larsen spoke of attending meetings of the directors of the East Asiatic Company -- the organization sponsoring the harbor operation. Despite Egan's arguments concerning the economic plight of the islands, the Governor held firmly to his belief that the harbor improvements would bring prosperity to the islands when the War ended.[33]

Egan's dispatch concerning this discussion failed to discourage Lansing. Undaunted, he sent Egan a telegram requesting him to expedite matters and "discreetly and confidantly speak to [the] Minister for Foreign Affairs with the view of ascertaining whether the Government of Denmark would be willing to approach the subject of sale at this time."[34]

Following Lansing's instructions, Egan consulted Danish Foreign Affairs Minister Scavenius on August 18. The next

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[33] The Lansing Papers, II, Egan to Secretary of State, No. 867, Copenhagen, July 17, 1915.

[34] The Lansing Papers, II, Lansing to Egan, Tel. No. 37, Washington, August 10, 1915.

day Egan telegrammed Lansing that Scavenius personally believed the islands should be sold but thought immediate action on the question might be difficult to achieve in time of war. Egan added that though the Minister had not yet consulted his colleagues or public opinion, "he felt that an offer generously made, safeguarding the interests of the inhabitants, would be seriously considered."[35] From this point on, all negotiations were carried on in secret. Talks were informal, and no records were kept. Unfortunately, this makes it impossible to assess Egan's exact role in the dealings.[36]

But while both governments deliberated, Egan did seek out influential Danes in an effort to get their support. He persevered in his campaign, begun years before, to convince the Danish public that the United States was "entirely in sympathy with any movement on the part of Denmark to improve the conditions of these islands."[37]

Egan's dispatches to the State Department during this period detailed the attitudes of the major European powers regarding the sale. Denmark was quite conscious of the opinions of her powerful neighbors, especially during World War I when she was totally dependent on them for raw materials for her industries and the markets for her exports. When rumors of an

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[35] The Lansing Papers, II, Egan to Secretary of State, Tel. No. 168, Copenhagen, August 19, 1915.

[36] Ten Years, p. 266.

[37] Foreign Relations Papers, Egan to Secretary of State, No. 889, Copenhagen, November 19, 1915.

impending sale of the islands appeared in Danish papers, Henry Lowther, the British Minister, told Egan that he continually advised his government to support the United States position. Egan assumed Lowther voiced the opinion of his government since he never openly expressed his own feelings.[38] Among Egan's other diplomatic colleagues, only French Minister Bapst objected to the actions of the United States.[39]

Germany, of course, was the one nation whose attitude Egan studied most carefully. It was unlikely that the Germans would oppose the sale of the islands since at this time they were anxious to remain at peace with the United States. Even when rumors of revolutions in the Danish Antilles revived press speculation of a Danish offer to sell the islands to the United States, Egan reported that the German Minister to Denmark, Count Brockdorff-Rantzau, was "entirely indifferent" to these stories.

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[38] Ibid.

[39] Foreign Relations Papers, Egan to Secretary of State, Tel. No. 189, Copenhagen, August 7, 1916. Egan later wrote, however, that Bapst "had very unjustly been accused of being against the sale." Ten Years, p. 269.

In this same account, Egan spoke of Lowther, the British Minister, as being "frankly delighted" that the question of the sale was to be reopened. Ten Years, p. 270.

Still later, though, in his Recollections, p. 238, Egan wrote: "A careful study of what might be called 'unedited documents' had taught me that neither England nor France was desirous that we should possess those islands; but England especially disliked the idea." These apparent inconsistencies in Egan's opinions may be the result of further information he got in later years with regard to the French Minister's private views and the British Government's official view. England, despite her unspoken opposition, was desirous of keeping in time of world war the good will of a then neutral United States and so kept her true feelings on the subject of the sale to herself.

"On the basis of other information," Egan was convinced "no German influence would be brought to bear on the [Danish] Foreign Office" to prevent a sale.[40] Lansing, still fearing a German encroachment on the Danish Antilles, disagreed with Egan; but Egan's interpretation of Germany's position at this time was correct.[41] An examination of German newspaper reaction to the signing and the ratification of the treaty by both the United States and Denmark substantiates his views. The few German newspapers still extant from the period indicate that throughout the seven months that it took to complete negotiations for the exchange, Germany appeared to have been totally concerned with matters of war and was completely disinterested in the territorial politics of her neutral northern neighbor. What little press coverage was given to the subject of the sale was entirely factual, unemotional, and unbiased.[42]

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[40] Foreign Relations Papers, Egan to Secretary of State, No. 889, Copenhagen, November 19, 1915.

[41] Egan's beliefs had changed considerably from the time of his arrival in Copenhagen. Even so, he occasionally did refer to fears of a German take-over when reporting to the State Department. These contradictions in his opinions can be explained. Undoubtedly, he was using the Department's fear of German encroachment as a tool to prod the United States Government into speeding up negotiations for the sale, thus allowing him to fulfill his dream. Egan was completely convinced by 1915 that Germany was too taken up with war matters to be concerned about the islands. Ten Years, p. 259.

[42] Frankfurter Zeitung und Handelsblatt, December 14-17, 1916. At the time of the plebiscite in Denmark when the populace voted in favor of the sale, no mention was made in this paper of the event. The only coverage given Denmark concerned her commerce. Topics of a war nature seemed to take precedence over all other topics.

In January 1917 when the two countries exchanged ratifications, the following brief unemotional account appeared in

Even the pro-German Danish newspaper Berlingske Tidende, loath to express an opinion concerning the proposed sale, weighed "the pros and cons of the situation in a composed way and put the responsibility [of a decision] on the shoulders of the [Danish] Cabinet and the Diet."[43] This reaction by a pro-German paper contrasted sharply with København and the [other] conservative [Danish] newspapers [which] reacted very violently against the sale.[44]

With little or no opposition from Denmark's neighbors, American-Danish discussions continued from August until October 1915. The Danes did their best to negotiate for a high price. Their position was difficult, however. The economic conditions in the islands were fast deteriorating despite the hopes that the Panama Canal would bring prosperity, and Danish financiers as well as the public again had lost interest in the territory. Denmark's position was further strained as her extensive social programs continued to put a heavy drain on the country's eco-

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Frankfurter Zeitung und Handelsblatt, January 19, 1917, p. 2. (A translation from the German) "Danish Minister in Washington telegraphed: 'The exchange of ratifications of the conventions from the fourth of August, 1916, concerning the transfer of the Danish West Indian Islands to the United States took place January 17, in Washington, between the Danish Minister and the American Secretary of State.'"

When the purchase was completed, no mention of the event appeared. Frankfurter Zeitung und Handelsblatt, April 2-7, 1917.

[43]Frankfurter Zeitung und Handelsblatt, August 6, 1916, p. 2.

[44]Ibid.

nomic resources.[45]

Secretary Lansing so urgently desired to purchase the islands, however, that he ignored these facts and actually played into the hands of the Danes by pressuring them to sell. Lansing even went so far as to threaten them with the suggestion that the United States might have to occupy the islands if Denmark lost sovereignty over them. He made his threat on November 15, when the Danish Minister Constantin Brun called on him to inquire whether "the United States would feel it necessary to take the Islands if Denmark should decide not to sell." Lansing responded:

> I had not considered this action to be necessary as I hoped we could get them by formal negotiations but that I could conceive of circumstances which would compel such action on our part: absorption of Denmark by some great power; or the sale, forced or voluntary, of the islands to another European power which would seek to convert them to a naval base.[46]

Egan, who knew nothing of Lansing's pressure tactics, was later embarrassed by them.[47]

Faced with Lansing's threat, Denmark set a high price for the islands despite her awkward position. The United States in its overzealous desire to possess the territory was forced to accept. Lansing reluctantly agreed to a sum of

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[45] The Lansing Papers, II, Egan to Secretary of State, No. 833, March 8, 1915.

[46] The Lansing Papers, II, Lansing to President Wilson, Washington, December 4, 1915, as quoted in Lansing, "Drama of the Virgin Islands Purchase," op. cit., p. 4.

[47] See text, pp. 71-72.

$25 million even though he considered it to be excessive. Having coerced Denmark into the sale, or so he thought, he was not in a position to haggle over the price.[48]

The blame for this excessive cost should not be placed entirely on Lansing, however. Wilson was so anxious to complete the sale that he was not inclined to debate the price either. "It would be a mistake to break off at this evidently opportune time on the question of money, within reasonable bounds," he wrote to his Secretary of State in January 1916.[49] Wilson's sense of urgency was apparently prompted by a General Board of the Navy report to him in December 1915, which stated that "the Virgin Islands had harbors that would make good naval bases and that the United States could not safely permit a potential enemy to acquire the Islands."[50]

Many Americans shared Lansing's dissatisfaction with the cost of the islands. Although the New York Times consistently favored the purchase, its first reaction was that the price was a "preposterously extravagant sum." A Times editorial stated that the defensive value of the islands might induce the United States "to pay for them more than they are worth," but "five times their estimated value . . . [was] entirely too much." Anticipating a Congressional rejection of the

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[48] The Lansing Papers, II, Lansing to Egan, Tel. No. 67, Washington, January 10, 1916.

[49] The Lansing Papers, II, W.W. to R. Lansing, January 7, 1916.

[50] G. Dewey to J. Daniels, December 10, 1915, quoted in Tansill, op. cit., pp. 481-483.

treaty, the paper claimed the Senate would not ratify it, the House of Representatives would not appropriate the money, and the general populace would concur.[51] Even Egan was shocked over the price. Nevertheless, he knew that the United States' offer had to be as generous as possible if the Danish Landsting was to approve the sale.

The formal signing of the treaty was delayed. Denmark desired minor concessions[52] and was wary of the international situation. In April 1916 Egan reported that the Danish Foreign Office had informed him that rumors of strained relations between the United States and Germany were the sole cause of delay. Egan promised the State Department that "as soon as I can overcome the fear, the negotiations will proceed smoothly."[53] Egan's assumption was correct, and on August 4, the treaty was signed in New York.

Now began the real battle -- a fierce, four-month political fight in Denmark, where members of the opposition tried to postpone the issue until after the War. When this move failed, some of them tried to force an election for a new Rigs-

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[51] New York Times, July 26, 1916, p. 10.

[52] The Lansing Papers, II, Egan to Secretary of State, Tel. No. 240, Copenhagen, April 27, 1916, and Lansing to Egan, Tel. No. 110, Washington, June 9, 1916.
The differences concerned concessions enjoyed by Danish firms and individuals in the islands and over Denmark's insistence that the United States reaffirm Denmark's claim to the whole of Greenland. Wilson insisted on yielding on all points. Link, op. cit., p. 82.

[53] Foreign Relations Papers, Egan to Secretary of State, No. 917, Copenhagen, April 10, 1916.

dag, another attempt to put off the issue. The United States would have been forced into war with Germany before a new Danish government could have resolved the conflict. Ultimately the question of ceding the islands was submitted to a special commission representing all the political parties. It was given six weeks to investigate the entire matter and issue a report of its findings. Fourteen days after the report was published, a plebiscite was held to decide the sale question.[54]

Egan was only an interested spectator during most of this political wrangling; but he did step into the fray whenever he saw an opportunity to help that would not undermine his delicate diplomatic position. Two instances of his activity in behalf of the sale are particularly noteworthy.

The first revolved around an incident stemming from the "high pressure" remarks Lansing had made earlier to Minister Brun. When the story about Lansing's views broke in the Danish press, a tense political situation quickly developed. In an effort to minimize the tension, Egan issued an official, public denial of the "pressure" charges. In reporting the story of Egan's denial, the conservative newspaper National Tidende, which opposed the sale, published an account of an interview with a high State Department official which supported Egan's pronouncement. But, according to National Tidende, the official -- a Counselor Polk -- also had indicated that the United States Senate was delaying ratification of the sale

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[54]Ten Years, pp. 272-274.

treaty in reaction to the high $25 million price tag and had suggested the Senate would not act on the matter during its current session.[55] If true, Egan knew this news would have had a devastating effect in the Rigsdag and would have destroyed all possibility of concluding the sale.

Egan immediately querried his Washington superiors about the interview's authenticity. Assured that it was false and that there were no serious obstacles in the Senate,[56] Egan then launched a full-scale attack against National Tidende and its article, including a public charge that the paper had been duped into printing a fabricated interview. The enraged National Tidende responded by calling Egan a liar since, it said, the United States State Department had not officially denied the interview or the information it contained. Ultimately, this heated exchange, which lasted for several days, proved to be quite beneficial to the American position. It pushed the question of the United States' pressure tactics far into the background and relieved the strain placed on the Danish Foreign Office by Lansing's unfortunate remarks.[57] The only adverse effect it had, according to Egan, was that the United States Minister was no longer "in the opinion of the whole press, the sweet and promising young poet of sixty-five, who had

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[55] Foreign Relations Papers, Egan to Secretary of State Tel. No. 323, Copenhagen, August 23, 1916; Ten Years, p. 278.

[56] The Lansing Papers, II, Lansing to Egan, Tel. No. 155, Washington, August 24, 1916.

[57] New York Times, August 29, 1916, p. 7; and Ten Years, pp. 278-281.

written sonnets."[58]

Egan also worked diligently in 1916 to induce the recently enfranchised female voters to side with the United States on the Danish West Indies question. The consensus was that Danish women would vote against the sale for sentimental and patriotic reasons. Egan began to lecture widely to women's groups in order to change the feminine view. On one occasion Madame Gad, a leading feminist, arranged for Egan to give an evening lecture for charity at Politiken Hus on "The American Woman and Her Aspirations."[59] A capacity crowd attended, and both the Copenhagen and provincial papers published favorable reports of Egan's performance. Egan's campaign to woo female votes was so successful that he received a great deal of mail from both individuals and women's organizations pledging either to vote for the sale or at least to abstain from voting against it.[60]

A comparatively small number of ballots were cast when the plebiscite took place on December 14, 1916. Approximately 284,000 voted for the sale and 158,000 against it. Shortly after, the Rigsdag voted for ratification, and on January 17, 1917, the exchange of ratifications took place.[61] The United

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[58] Ten Years, p. 278.

[59] American women had still not obtained the vote and this caused many of the Danes to doubt the quality of American democracy.

[60] Ten Years, pp. 284-296.

[61] Foreign Relations Papers, Egan to Secretary of State, Copenhagen, Tel. Nos. 397, December 15, 1916; 401, December

States Senate had long before approved the treaty.[62] Egan could not yet congratulate himself for eleven years of work well done. Despite the exchange of ratifications, it took two more months for the United States to obtain full title to the islands. It was not until March 31, 1917, just fifty-two hours before President Wilson delivered his war message in the Capitol, that the Virgin Islands came fully under the sovereign jurisdiction of the United States.

20, 1916; 402, December 21, 1916; 405, December 22, 1916.

U.S. Treaties, 1913-21 (Wilson), Convention Between the United States and Denmark. Cession of the Danish West Indies, Treaty Series No. 629, Washington, 1915.

[62] Wilson had sent the treaty to the Senate on August 8, and Lansing bluntly warned the Foreign Relations Committee on August 18 that Denmark might sell the islands to some other power if the United States did not pay the price demanded. That, he added, would be a direct challenge to the Monroe Doctrine. The Senate, after a favorable report by the Foreign Relations Committee on September 5, debated the treaty in executive session for only two hours on September 7 and consented to ratification by a huge majority. New York Times, September 8, 1917.

CHAPTER IV

WORLD WAR I

With the outbreak of hostilities among the Great European powers in 1914 all Scandinavia felt endangered. People showed their fears by runs on banks and by hoarding food. Banks and governments reacted differently at first, but all recognized the existence of an overwhelming outside force over whose actions they had no control. The Scandinavian peoples became imbued with a sense of weakness in their innocence, of uncertainty from day to day, of want through no fault of their own, and of deep disillusionment in the good faith and intelligence of men. So with national existence at stake the whole of Scandinavia became neutrality minded.[1]

Denmark, following the pattern set by the rest of Scandinavia, immediately took steps to protect its economic interests. The near financial panic that accompanied the outbreak of war made it necessary to close the Copenhagen Stock Exchange and to declare a moratorium on the conversion of bank notes into gold. On August 6 exportation of a long list of goods was prohibited. At almost the same time an attempt was made in cooperation with Industriraadet (the Danish Chamber of Manu-

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[1] Franklin D. Scott, The United States and Scandinavia (Cambridge, 1950), pp. 211, 213.

facturers) to facilitate deliveries of goods to overseas buyers by securing promises from manufacturers not to take advantage of the state of war and suspend contracts. Denmark was also greatly concerned with deliveries of coal imports, for the price of coal had doubled within a few days and no one knew whether more supplies could be obtained from England. Thus it was with some relief that the Danes received assurances from the British that their exports would continue as much as possible provided the Danish Government guaranteed that the imported British coal would not be re-exported to England's enemies. Further government steps included the establishment on August 7, 1914, of price controls on food and other essential commodities and the issuance on August 11 of an ordinance decreeing a reduction of twenty-five per cent in the price of coal. In order to encourage both foreign and domestic shipping companies to risk their ships and crews to deliver coal, the government arranged a War Risk Insurance scheme on August 11 with four Danish marine insurance firms. This plan required the shipping companies to pay only twenty-five per cent of the premiums, with the Danish Government funding the rest.[2]

The Danish Court was generally sympathetic to the Allied cause, and King Christian X sent a personal representative, Etatsraad H.N. Andersen, to London to establish close ties with the British Government. Despite the King's sympathy for Great

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[2]Marion C. Siney, The Allied Blockade of Germany, 1914-1916 (Ann Arbor, 1957), p. 45.

Britain's position, however, those in Danish governmental circles were concerned that Germany would take reprisals against Denmark if Danish export policy was too favorable to the Allies, especially the English. It was especially feared that the Germans would capture the key port of Esbjerg on the west coast of Jutland. Denmark, therefore, was quite anxious to make the world aware of her desire to remain outside the conflict. She took several measures to publicize this intention, largely for the benefit of her German neighbors. On August 1 the first of several official proclamations of Danish neutrality was made in a royal message. The next day the Rigsdag passed an act prohibiting the provisioning of belligerent warships in Danish ports. On August 5 and 6 the Government mined the approaches to the Baltic in the hope that the action would prevent naval conflict in her territorial waters.[3]

Appeasement of the Germans, however, was not the sole motive for these measures to ensure Danish neutrality. They were equally motived by the Danes' desire to avoid any involvement in the Allied system of economic control and to escape the consequences of failing to accede to British demands for Denmark's compliance. Although she did not border on any of the Allied Powers, Denmark was highly susceptible to any

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[3]Palle Lauring, A History of the Kingdom of Denmark (Copenhagen, 1960), p. 236. Germany had threatened to lay the mines in Danish waters herself unless Denmark closed them off. So, after discussions with Great Britain, who would otherwise have disapproved strongly, thus imposing serious consequences on Denmark's economic life, the Danes chose the latter course of action.

economic pressure from them, as well as from the Germans. The Allies controlled the sea lanes and were in a position to prevent vital raw materials and other overseas imports from reaching Danish ports.[4]

Despite these problems, Denmark, while preserving her neutral status, succeeded in maintaining a precarious economic balance during the early years of the War by trading with the belligerent nations.[5] Denmark was, in fact, the best example of the mutual tolerance showed by the belligerents. She sold food to Germany, but in order to produce food, she had to import animal fodder from Britain. To obtain the fodder, she also had to sell food to Britain, the chief buyer of Danish butter, bacon, and eggs. The Germans tacitly allowed this trade in order to obtain the supplies they needed from Denmark. In one case they captured and then deliberately released two ships bound with food for Britain.[6] Likewise, the British Government had to consent to the re-exportation of at least small amounts of British-made goods because it realized that Germany might undertake reprisals against Denmark if the British Government refused these concessions. Even if Germany did not undertake military measures against Denmark, the Allies were morally obligated to provide the Danes with the articles they usually imported from Germany if in retaliation these

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[4]Siney, op. cit., p. 248.

[5]Lauring, op. cit., p. 236.

[6]Scott, op. cit., p. 222.

were cut off. For England this would have involved a reallocation of raw materials and tonnage at a time when the scarcity of tonnage was becoming a problem of greatest importance to the Allies. The Danes were thus in an excellent position to play one belligerent off against the other.[7]

It was in this sensitive economic and political climate that Maurice Francis Egan operated the United States Legation in Denmark. His task was difficult from the beginning, but his problems multiplied when the United States entered the war. In spite of them, however, he performed his official duties well. He also tried to make the most of his opportunities to be somewhat of a political observer, although his colleagues often questioned the wisdom of his views on current affairs. These opportunities arose from both his official position and the geographical location of his post. Copenhagen, often referred to by many diplomats of the day as "the whispering gallery of Europe," was an ideal place to glean useful intelligence because of its proximity to the major European powers and its key location in widely trafficked European shipping lanes. It was the spiritual center of numerous new social and political movements -- especially socialism, which had made great inroads into Danish internal politics despite the fact that Denmark is one of the oldest continuous monarchies in the world. The capital also provided an opportunity to study the effect that a large, powerful nation could

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[7]Siney, op. cit., pp. 96-97.

have on the affairs of a small, relatively weak neighbor. According to Egan, few persons benefited from Denmark's propinquity to the German "menace." "In 1907-8-9-10-11, no experience in watching German methods seemed of much value to our own people [the Americans] or to England."[8]

In reality, even Egan failed to benefit from the experience he claimed this proximity to Germany provided until just a year before war broke out. Throughout the period 1907-13, he never saw any proximate danger of war although the factors that caused the continent to erupt in 1914 smoldered all during the period. His thinking was consistently pervaded by the naive, idealistic notion that somehow men were too gentlemanly and war too costly for such a horrible thing to happen. He must be given credit, however, for correctly prophesying the area where the holocaust would be ignited. In 1908 he commented that the Balkans was the area to watch for trouble if it was to occur; this region was "the Aetna and Vesuvius of the diplomatic world."[9] Still he failed, like so many others of his era, to assess the importance of the violent winds of revolution and change brewing in that rugged region of southern Europe. At the height of the tension between Austria and Serbia in 1909, which was caused by Austria's annexation of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Egan contended that no real threat of war existed because a conflict would be too ex-

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[8] Ten Years, p. 55.

[9] Ibid., p. 51.

pensive for both sides. He held steadfastly to this view despite the fact that all of his diplomatic colleagues disagreed.[10] In early March 1909, he wrote to Secretary of State Knox that "any opinion of the possibility of Austria [sic] moving on to Belgrade and precipitating war will be discounted before this reaches you." He carefully qualified his remarks by adding that most diplomats in Copenhagen believed differently and were extremely concerned over a possible outbreak of war.[11] Surprisingly, in the same dispatch Egan showed keen insight into the pattern of alignments which would take place among the powers in just five and one-half years. He related to Knox that the Austrian Minister, Count Szechenyi, had told him that Austria should punish Serbia at once. The Russians in Copenhagen insisted that any such action by Austria would force the Czar to support Serbia, a move which would be quickly accepted by the Russian people. Russian diplomats claimed "they [the Russian people] would welcome a war against Austria as an opportunity to show that their army can do what their fleet failed to do in the Japanese War." Egan acknowledged that if faced with such a threat Austria would need aid from her German allies but he discounted the possibility that this aid would be forthcoming.[12]

Not only Egan's diplomatic colleagues, but the Danes

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[10] Ibid., pp. 92-94.

[11] Foreign Relations Papers, Egan to Secretary of State, no No., Copenhagen, March 1, 1909.

[12] Ibid.

as well, did not share Egan's opinion that the Germans would avoid armed conflict. The memory of the conquest of Schleswig-Holstein was still too fresh in Danish minds. The Danes believed that Germany was headed toward war in Europe and that it would be only a matter of time before they seized Denmark.[13] How best to remain neutral -- and independent -- was a subject hotly debated in the Danish Rigsdag. The conservatives wanted to build defensive fortifications and train troops while more radical groups argued that this would be a waste of money since it could only delay, not prevent, the inevitable should Germany attack. Between these polarized opinions lay numerous other views about the appropriate action to take.

Though he was thoroughly convinced that Germany did not want war, Egan, nevertheless, was well aware of her use of economic, political, cultural, and even religious means in her attempt to secure control over the Danes. Ultimately he realized that the results would be the same as a military conquest as far as United States-Danish relations were concerned.[14]

Egan also believed that the arbitration movement would be effective in maintaining world peace.[15] The movement had

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[13] Ten Years, p. 39 ff.

[14] Ibid., pp. vii-ix, 91. German attempts at commercial domination were not restricted solely to Denmark, however. During trips to the Netherlands and Belgium, Egan observed that "Germany loomed large" over these countries as well as over Denmark. He judged that Germany was bent on commercial supremacy everywhere.

[15] Paradoxically, the movement was reaching new heights just at the time World War I broke out.
The United States had in May 1908 signed an arbitration

received new impetus in March 1913 when William Jennings Bryan, one of the leading proponents of the peace movement, became Secretary of State in the Wilson Cabinet. Within a month after taking office, Bryan had outlined a plan for an extensive series of arbitration treaties between the United States and several other countries of the world. According to this plan, both parties would agree to submit all questions, without exception, to an investigating commission and would abstain from hostilities until the commission had made its report. The commission was to consist of five men. Each disputing nation was to choose one from its own population and one from a foreign state. The fifth member was to be selected by the two nations together. The commission's report would only be advisory, but the time taken to prepare it would provide a cooling-off period that would allow many disputes to settle themselves. Bryan also thought that the weight of world public opinion would induce the two disputing countries to accept the commission's

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treaty with Denmark by which disputes of a legal nature or those relating to the interpretation of treaties would be submitted to the Permanent Court of Arbitration at The Hague, whenever ordinary diplomatic means had failed and both parties agreed to submit the case in question to The Hague court. In any such case the two countries were to make a special agreement defining the matter in dispute, the scope of the powers of the arbitrators, the periods to be fixed for the formation of the arbitral tribunal, and the several stages of the procedure. This was not unlimited arbitration, by any means, however; either country could withhold submission of any case which it considered to affect its vital interests, threaten its independence, or threaten its honor, or concern the interests of a third party.

U.S. Treaties, 1901-09 (Roosevelt), Convention Between the United States and Denmark, Arbitration, Treaty Series No. 520 (Washington, 1909).

decision.[16]

Bryan's proposal was well received throughout the world, and thirty treaties were negotiated by the United States, although only twenty of these were ever ratified and their terms were not so sweeping as proposed in Bryan's original plan. The United States treaty with Denmark was signed in Washington on February 5, 1914. But whatever satisfaction the signing may have given Bryan was short-lived, as the Senate made it plain that it would not approve the treaty. On April 17, 1914, a second United States-Danish treaty, providing merely for use of the commission system, was signed and eventually ratified.[17] Bryan exulted in his success, but his triumphs were hollow and pathetic because World War I had already started before most of the treaties had been ratified.[18]

Despite his overly optimistic expectations that peace would continue in Europe, Egan was not completely taken by surprise when hostilities began in August 1914. As early as 1908 Egan felt that German financiers were "growing more and more furiously jealous of England [and wanted] to make a

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[16]Merle E. Curti, Bryan and World Peace, "Smith College Studies in History," vol. XVI, nos. 3-4 (Northampton, Mass., April-July, 1931), p. 150.

[17]U.S. Treaties, 1913-21 (Wilson), Treaty for the Advancement of General Peace, Concluded Between the United States and Denmark, Treaty Series No. 608 (Washington, 1915). See also U.S. Foreign Relations, 1915, pp. 276-78, and Foreign Relations Papers, Constantin Brun to Secretary of State Bryan, Washington, March 28, 1914, for a statement of Denmark's dissatisfaction over the failure of the first treaty.

[18]Curti, op. cit., p. 153.

financial wilderness of London and reconstruct the money center of the world in Berlin."[19] Other facts such as the persistent build-up of the German Navy caused him to doubt his earlier views and by early 1914 those convictions became absolutely untenable for him. He realized that Europe was close to war. When he received secret information in early 1914 about Russian and German intentions, Egan prepared for war's imminent outbreak. He obtained the information from two Russian diplomats, Prince Koudacheff, one-time Russian minister to Copenhagen, and Michael Bibikoff, secretary of the Russian Legation. He had become friendly with these men years earlier and from time to time they had given him information about conditions in Russia and the diplomatic intentions of Russia, Austria, Germany, and the Balkan countries.

In February 1914, Bibikoff, then stationed in Munich, arranged to meet clandestinely with Egan in a Copenhagen hotel to pass to him confidential information about Russian and German maneuverings. Bibikoff even went so far during their meeting to predict that war would start no later than September 1914. Though Bibikoff substantiated his assertions with proofs which were a bit amazing, the startled Egan readily accepted them because he knew, as he later recalled, "at Munich he [Bibikoff] had access to much information, and I knew him well enough to understand that, if there was any secret information to be had, he would manage to get it."[20]

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[19] Ten Years, p. 77.

[20] Recollections, pp. 293-294.

Notably absent from any of these talks were discussions about Austria and Serbia. Egan was understandably preoccupied with the subject of Germany.

Bibikoff knew well the attitudes of the ruling factions in Russia and predicted that Russia would soon be forced to fight because she believed Germany was determined to leave her no other choice. He expected Italy to remain neutral in any conflict among the powers. Since she was not bound to aid Austria, he reasoned, she had nothing to gain by assisting the Austrians unless Germany and Austria together could offer her great territorial expansion opportunities. He believed Italy would not aid France either because of certain very evident jealousies between them. "Unless England came to her rescue," Bibikoff gloomily forewarned, "France was doomed."[21]

Egan had to promise his Russian friend that he would not make a written report about their conversation to the Department of State or use Bibikoff's name in United States Legation dispatches. Since Egan had already planned a trip to the United States to lecture at Harvard, however, the promise in no way hindered his reporting the vital information to his Washington superiors. He simply briefed the Secretary of State in person. Bryan, unfortunately, was totally uninterested and dismissed Egan's report as inconsequential. An opportunity to circumvent the Secretary's indifferent attitude arose when Egan had a short five-minute conference with Pres-

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[21] Ibid., p. 294.

ident Wilson shortly thereafter. Wilson was not well at the time though, so Egan decided to put off his revelation for a more appropriate occasion.[22] But Egan became ill and before a second meeting between the two men could be arranged Egan's news was no longer relevant. While Egan was still recuperating from a kidney operation, Archduke Francis Ferdinand was assassinated and Europe was at war.[23]

When he was released from the hospital, Egan disregarded his doctor's advice and took the first available steamship for Copenhagen, arriving there on August 24.[24] Back at his post, he soon found that the American Legation was ill-equipped both in staff and office space to take care of the increased demands for its services created by the war.[25] The staff, which at the beginning consisted of five persons, including the min-

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[22] Ibid., pp. 295-296.

[23] Ibid., pp. 298-299. Egan had left Denmark on March 26, 1914, intending to give a series of eight lectures at Harvard on the subject of "Typical Christian Hymns in Common Use." These were to end on May 12, and he was then to make another speaking tour through the South under the auspices of the Southern Commercial Congress, similar to his tour in 1912. This would have ended about the third week in June. However, he was taken seriously ill in the latter part of May, as reported in the New York Times, May 26, 1914, p. 5, and he was operated on in Providence Hospital, Washington, D.C. It was not until August 7, 1914, that he was discharged from the hospital.

[24] Ibid., p. 299.

[25] Ten Years, p. 301. Egan could have rented a satisfactory building -- on "urgent request" to the State Department -- but the coal bill, which would have amounted to about $3,000 a year, was prohibitive since the State Department would not allot added funds for fuel. Egan estimated that it would have cost about $20,000 to put the United States Legation on an efficient wartime basis.

ister, was gradually increased, but its size was never completely adequate. Too many tasks were demanded of it. Denmark because of its neutrality had become a haven for Americans who had been stranded in Germany at the outbreak of war. Many without papers or money turned to the American Minister for help. During the first month of the war, the Legation spent over $8,000 just for telegrams sent to relatives of stranded Americans. As time passed, many of the refugees became wards of the Legation. Most were grateful for the aid they received but there were also those who were completely thankless. Egan in his memoirs cited one Southern schoolmaster who thought that the United States Government should have prevented the war so that he could have continued his tour of Europe without interruption. "I am forty-two years of age," the man announced to Egan. "I have saved $2,000 and I have looked forward to this trip all my life. Now largely through the fault of my own government, I am obliged to go back without seeing anything I really expected to see. I shall never vote the Democratic ticket again."[26]

Egan's activities were not restricted solely to aiding stranded Americans during the war's first few months. Neu-

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[26] Recollections, pp. 300-301. Egan added that the United States Government was generous in making funds available for the use of stranded Americans. But if this had been lacking, Adolph Stein, the representative of the Standard Oil Company in Denmark, and a close friend of Egan's, had offered the Legation the use of the Standard Oil funds in his safe should the need arise. Egan believed that this fact should be recorded to show the good intentions of the company "at a time when every demagogue throws a stone at the Standard Oil Corporation . . . ."

tral Denmark continued to be an excellent location for gathering intelligence, and although he was badly handicapped by limited financial and personnel resources, the American Minister supplied the State Department with a constant stream of reports containing news about Germany, Russia, Denmark, and other European countries. He also kept busy feeding deceptive tidbits of information to the numerous spies living in the city -- "the ultra-American young woman from San Francisco or the young man with the painfully acquired English accent." If used, the information Egan provided "must have brought them to disaster."[27]

Another of Egan's numerous responsibilities was the task of working with the Danish legal authorities to protect the rights of American firms doing business in Denmark. Since the United States did not enter the War until 1917, American firms sold goods to both groups of belligerents during the War's first three years. They shipped their goods to Germany and the other Entente powers through neutral countries like Denmark because of the British blockade. Large concerns like the Swift and Armour meat-packing companies, for example, even established branch offices in Copenhagen. In late November 1914, an alarmed British Restriction of Enemy Supply Committee reported that Copenhagen had become a large-scale base of supply for tinned meat and lard: over one million pounds of lard had been imported into Denmark in October 1914 alone, and meat im-

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[27] Ibid., pp. 301-302.

ports had tripled. Moreover, there were similar increases in oil, rubber, and copper orders.[28]

The British attempted to stop this roundabout trade with Germany by stopping and censoring mail sent between Denmark and the United States and by holding up all commercial cablegrams between the two nations. This was quite easy since they owned the cable connecting Denmark with the United States. Orders could never be filled, the British reasoned, if they never reached the suppliers. American businessmen were highly annoyed with these British practices and besieged Egan with calls for help. Though sympathetic, he was powerless to do anything except relay the complaints to the Department of State. In fact, he was faced with the same problem himself. The American Legation in Denmark did not have a "diplomatic pouch service" until late in the War, and the British censors were holding up the Legation's mail, too.[29]

The attention the Legation staff devoted to businessmen's problems and commercial transactions soared when Britain set out to seriously restrain foreign trade with the Entente powers. Men who had been totally unconcerned about war rumors just a few short months before suddenly demanded vast amounts of information concerning German activities. Egan, in disgust, remarked later that "knowing the ability of our businessmen

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[28]Siney, op. cit., pp. 45-48.

[29]Foreign Relations Papers, Egan to Secretary of State, Tel. No. 269, Copenhagen, July 14, 1916. This even included mail from the Legation to the Secretary of State in Washington.

and their knowledge of affairs in Europe, . . . I was astonished to find them acting, when the war began, as the directors of a great life insurance company might act, if a city had burned, and they had been so complacent as not to have provided a sinking fund."[30] Egan was especially irritated when he asked the representative of one western business firm, whose exports from Germany amounted to over $32 million annually, why he had not kept in closer contact with the American Ambassador in Berlin. The businessman's answer thoroughly grated on Egan. "Ambassadors are ornamental," the man replied, "and political appointees are here to-day and gone to-morrow. Because you are an ancient 'hold over,' do not put on airs! If you can't help us, I suppose our consignment of $16,000,000 of goods can not be got out of Germany!"[31] It is unfortunate that Egan never mentioned the names of the men or companies with whom he had such dealings.

Generally there was little that Egan could do directly to help American businessmen. Everything depended on the prevailing mood of the Danes. In self-preservation they had set

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[30] Ten Years, p. 298.

[31] Ibid. Such remarks underscored Egan's belief in the weakness and fallacy of the United States diplomatic service at that time. He had long contended that the Foreign Service desperately needed to be overhauled because frequent changes in administrations made politically appointed diplomats only temporary fixtures without authority and unable to command any respect -- this in areas where men of considerable skill were needed. Egan wrote many articles on the subject and was to continue his campaign for a revamping of the Foreign Service after he retired. See Epilogue.

up an embargo which they alternately enforced or lifted depending on the pressure being exerted on them by the Germans or the British. Cargoes of cotton, tobacco, and meat belonging to American firms were often frozen in Denmark as a result of this measure. Egan kept busy trying to have them released. When conditions were favorable he had to act quickly. When the embargo acted against American interests he had to face the unpleasant task of explaining this to less than understanding businessmen.

During the period of American neutrality, Egan, who had been Minister since 1907, became the Dean -- or senior member in length of service -- of the diplomatic corps in Copenhagen. His position was quite ticklish since most of the diplomats in the Danish capital were members of one of the two belligerent camps and during time of war were officially not on speaking terms with one another. The only place that the representatives of the warring powers saw each other was in church. So many of the diplomats in Copenhagen were Catholics that St. Ansgar's Catholic Church was referred to frequently as "the diplomat's church." But, said Egan, Count Szechenyi of Austria and Prince Wittgenstein of Germany "were always so deeply engaged in prayer that they would not see the French Minister or the Belgian."[32] Fortunately, Egan's genial personality kept him on good terms with all of his diplomatic colleagues, including the German Minister, Count Brockdorff-Rantzau --

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[32]Ibid., pp. 290-292.

"one of the most cynical, brilliant, forcible diplomatists in Europe." Although he infuriated other people, Egan found him delightful. In later years Egan remarked that "I shall always miss him. He is the kind of man whose society you covet on this earth, because if all signs prove true, you are not likely to meet him in Heaven -- until late in Eternity!"[33]

In 1914 Egan had shared his colleagues' view that the war would be very short. Germany had the advantage during the early stages. Along with Brockdorff-Rantzau and Szechenyi, Egan thought that the Germans would call an end to the fighting once they had established a powerful position in the Near East since the crucial problem lay in the control of Bulgaria, Serbia, and Constantinople. Once Egan realized the War would be prolonged he became convinced that the United States would inevitably be drawn into it. He also thought that American intervention, though undesirable, was probably needed to curtail the hostilities. He voiced these sentiments in one of his frequent letters to Roosevelt. In September 1916, the former President answered Egan in a truly classic example of Rooseveltian prose:

> Good Lord! How I wish I could see you and talk with you. It is not advisable that I put on paper, and still less advisable for you to receive, a complete statement of my views at the present moment. They are not only unfit to print, but barely fit for writing.[34]

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[33] Ten Years, p. 270. Count Szechenyi, the Austrian Minister, was also one of Egan's closest friends in Denmark.

[34] T. Roosevelt to Egan, New York, September 14, 1916. Letter on loan from Mrs. John Cramer.

On January 31, 1917, Germany announced its resumption of unrestricted submarine warfare. Although it seemed fairly certain that Germany's action would lead to the sinking of American ships and provoke the United States, Wilson made one last effort to preserve peace. On February 3, 1917, he called on the neutral nations of the world to join the United States in the peaceful sanction of breaking off diplomatic relations with Germany. Several western hemisphere nations, and later China, complied with the suggestion, but none of the European neutrals acceded to it.[35] These small countries were geographically too close to Germany to risk taking such a step. Furthermore, none was too eager to support any American proposal since the United States had not been overly cooperative with the neutrals in recent years.[36] Denmark's reply, which Egan forwarded to Wilson, was somewhat representative of the neutrals' views:

> I [the Danish Minister of Foreign Affairs] authorize you to communicate to your government that in the opinion of the Danish Government the position of Denmark both actually and formally is so different from that of the United States that it is not possible to draw an analogy from the one to the other, and further that the three northern governments are in consultation with one another at Stockholm in order to fix on a basis of international law the attitude to be taken by them on account of the new German regulation.[37]

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[35]Harley Notter, The Origins of the Foreign Policy of Woodrow Wilson (Baltimore, 1937), pp. 619-621.

[36]See, for example, Foreign Relations Papers, The Lansing Papers, I, p. 225; and Foreign Relations Papers, 1916, Supp., pp. 696-697, in which the United States declined to take part in a neutral conference because the geographical position of this country made its problems so very different from those of countries contiguous to the belligerents.

[37]Foreign Relations Papers, Egan to Secretary of State,

Congress declared war on April 6. With this event neutral Denmark became even more important as a listening post, and Egan was asked to step up his intelligence gathering activities. For Egan and his small overworked staff that was impossible. So, Egan asked Seymour Beach Conger, the Associated Press correspondent in Denmark, to help interview refugees, particularly Americans, who had fled from Germany.[38] Conger was valuable because he had previous military and reporting experience and as a newspaperman he could question persons who were otherwise inaccessible to the Legation staff. Yet he was able to gain little new knowledge for Egan this way. Most of the refugees' information concerned food conditions in Germany and political news derived from reading the German newspapers. Granted there was a continuing shortage of money and personnel and Egan's health again began to be a problem, but numerous reports in the Department of State files indicate that a certain amount of seemingly effective espionage and counterespionage work was carried on in Copenhagen. The following telegram from Egan is just one example:

> I am informed that the English aeroplanes in their last raid could not find the Zeppelin and aeroplane stations at Tondern in Slesvig but I know exactly where they are. It [sic] lies about one kilometer outside of Tondern to the northeast between the railroad tracks and the

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Tel. No. 439, Copenhagen, February 6, 1917. For the responses of the other European neutrals, see Foreign Relations Papers, 1917, Supp. 1, pp. 116-43, passim.

[38] Ten Years, p. 321. This book contains only a few pages of information regarding Egan's activities in Denmark after the United States had entered the War.

> road to Denmark. It is very easy to find on account of the fortifications are obvious but the station itself is not so easy to see because of the gray roofs. It is from this station that most of the Zeppelins and aeroplanes go and come from England. It is safer than the one in Belgium and the other places farther south.39

Upon entering the War, the United States became highly concerned over the need to control the large volume of trade that Denmark was carrying on with Germany. During the period of its own neutrality, the United States Government had not objected to the lucrative business which American firms were doing with the neutral countries of Europe. It was no secret that this trade helped Germany since American exports frequently filtered into Germany, or at least substituted for the domestic products of European neutrals when their products were shipped into Germany.[40] From 1914 to 1917 the British had done their best to control this trade, but the United States was too powerful and her good will too valuable for the British to risk a rupture, and so the blockade of Germany could not be enforced as vigorously as all-out warfare would have required. But when

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[39] Foreign Relations Papers, Egan to Lansing, Tel. No. 792, Copenhagen, June 25, 1917.

[40] Thomas A. Bailey, The Policy of the United States Toward the Neutrals, 1917-1918 (Baltimore, 1942), pp. 34-36. According to Bailey, the figures show that the countries that were buying grain, notably Holland and Denmark, were selling large quantities of their own butter, eggs, and meat to Germany. Official British statistics revealed that an annual fat ration sufficient to supply 7,700,000 soldiers was being shipped to Germany from the Northern Neutrals. Not only was fat one of the most serious deficiencies of the blockaded Central Powers, but the very cows that produced the butter were in large measure fed with feedstuffs produced in the United States.

the United States entered the War, her point of view became that of a belligerent. She was no longer primarily interested in neutral rights or in trade profits. She now turned her full attention to winning the War.

Faced with this challenge, the United States changed her views on supplying neutrals during wartime. Official policy now dictated that American goods and those of the allies should be used primarily for the war effort. Only items that were surplus to this requirement would be shipped to the neutrals, and then only if those nations guaranteed that the products they were given would not be used to help the Entente powers. Furthermore, the neutral nations were required to make some of their shipping tonnage available to the United States and her allies as partial payment for the right to receive the "surplus" items. A carefully worked out rationing and tonnage agreement was necessary in order to secure these guarantees from the neutrals, and in the meantime a virtual embargo was placed on shipments to them. By proclamations of July 9 and August 27, 1917, President Wilson enumerated a list of products that could not be exported without a special license, and such licenses were not given, with but few exceptions, for the Scandinavian countries.[41] The lengthy negotiations for the Danish shipping and tonnage agreements were carried on in Washington, and finally on September 18, 1918, an agreement was reached.[42] American officials felt an em-

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[41] Ibid., p. 187.

[42] Ibid., pp. 170-193.

bargo, particularly on feedstuffs and petroeum would limit considerably the Danish dairy and fishing industries and so prevent them from producing surpluses to supply the Germans. They did not understand, however, that the complete cessation of Denmark's German trade would bring about a serious economic dislocation, if not actual prostration.[43] Nor was the fact that the Danes were supplying more food to the British than to the Germans considered seriously enough.[44] The British, who had earlier signed agreements with the Danes, had recognized this situation and had been willing to allow a certain amount of Danish trade with the Germans.[45]

Egan fully appreciated the Danes' predicament, caught as they were between two warring camps, with each taking its toll on the Danish economy. In repeated reports to the State Department, Egan stressed the fact that the Danes needed American exports of petroleum and animal feed since the supplies formerly obtained from Russia had been cut off and there was danger that the Danish herds would be irretrievably lost. But Egan's request was made in vain.[46]

On July 6, shortly after the embargo was established by the United States, Egan was hospitalized for three months. Finally ill health forced him to leave his post in Denmark and he returned to the United States on December 16, 1917, where

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[43] Ibid., p. 39.

[44] Ibid., pp. 42-44.

[45] Siney, op. cit., pp. 98-104. See Chapter IV, p. 78.

[46] Recollections, pp. 312, 320-321.

he spent his time working to counteract German propaganda in the United States. It was chiefly for this purpose that he wrote his book Ten Years Near the German Frontier: A Retrospect and a Warning in 1918.[47] In it he stressed the baleful effect of German influence on Europe, particularly on Denmark. He was deeply impressed by the German propaganda effort among the Scandinavian countries and he wrote several chapters on the Germans' use of Kultur and religion for propaganda purposes.[48] He believed that the German propaganda in the United States was slanted in the same direction.

During these months Maurice Francis Egan continued to be United States Minister to Denmark, but on May 30, 1918, he realized that his health would prevent him from resuming his work in the near future so he offered his resignation to President Wilson and Secretary Lansing. The Administration accepted it with regret, and on June 5, 1918, the Department of State officially announced to the nation and to the world[49] that Maurice Francis Egan's twelve-year term, the longest served by any non-career United States diplomat at a single post,[50] had come to an end.

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[47] Ten Years, pp. vii-viii.

[48] See, for example, Chapter VII, "Kultur as Patron of Danish Letters", and Chapter VIII, "The Religious Propaganda".

[49] New York Times, June 6, 1918.

[50] Graham H. Stuart, American Diplomatic and Consular Practice, p. 260.

EPILOGUE

Egan's resignation from government service did not signal the end of his public life. It merely marked a change in its direction. Retirement from diplomatic duty enabled him to return to his literary career, curtailed temporarily by his stay in Denmark.

One last attempt was apparently made to bring Egan back into diplomatic service, however, despite his ill-health and determination to remain retired from such work. He was mentioned in Washington circles in early 1919 as a possible choice for U.S. Ambassador to Italy. His selection would have been highly appropriate, of course, in view of Italy's overwhelmingly Catholic population. In April, however, Egan told Joseph Tumulty, Wilson's private secretary, that he was definitely not interested in the post. He suggested his close friend Robert Underwood Johnson, also a writer, as a worthy substitute. Johnson received the post in early 1920, presumably through Egan's influence, and served as Ambassador to Italy for the remainder of Wilson's administration.[1]

During the five and one-half years of his semi-retirement, Egan busied himself by writing numerous articles and

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[1] Jerome Elmer Murphy, Egan's grandson, in interview with author, February 1966.

reviews for newspapers and magazines as well as three volumes of reminiscences: Ten Years Near the German Frontier, Confessions of a Book Lover, and Recollections of a Happy Life. Since he was considered an expert on European affairs, his views on current diplomatic problems were especially sought by the press, which frequently quoted him.[2]

Much of Egan's critical writing during his last years was concerned with the reform of the United States diplomatic and consular service. Egan firmly believed that "our country has suffered terribly by the haphazard appointments of inexperienced and untrained commissioners."[3] He even went so far in his reform campaign to ask, in September 1920, presidential candidate Warren G. Harding to consider the creation of a diplomatic and consular service. Egan remarked to the future president that although the consular service had improved since Theodore Roosevelt's administration the diplomatic service remained in a "deplorable state" -- especially since the tenure of William Jennings Bryan as Secretary of State.[4] The editor of Collier's attested to Egan's success

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[2]See, for example, New York Times, December 29, 1917: "The Danes Favor the Allies"; New York Times, November 3, 1918: "Germans to Soon Seek Peace"; New York Times, November 6, 1918: "Danes Desire for Return of Schleswig"; New York Times, January 26, 1919: "Need for Education of American Public in Foreign Affairs"; New York Times, January 26, 1919: "Need for Reform of U.S. Diplomatic Service".

[3]Maurice Francis Egan, "Our Extraordinary Envoys," Collier's, Vol. 67, No. 13 (March 26, 1921), pp. 7-18.

[4]I am indebted to Professor Richard B. Sherman for this citation from the Warren G. Harding Papers at the Ohio Historical Society, Columbus, Ohio. Egan to W.G. Harding, Mountain Lake Park, Maryland, September 25, 1920.

in alerting the public about reforming the diplomatic service in a March 1921 article. "Nobody has been stirring up the State Department more effectively," the editor wrote. "He [Egan] is a useful man to have around at this moment when we are just beginning to realize that . . . an efficient State Department and competent ambassadors are needed . . . ."[5]

Egan also received many significant honors during this period. Two honorary degrees were bestowed upon him.[6] He was elected to membership in the American Academy of Arts and Letters. The National Institute of Arts and Letters chose him as its president. King Christian X of Denmark in 1918 presented him with the highest Danish decoration that could be awarded to a commoner, the Grand Cross of the Order of Dannebrog. Finally, in 1923 Egan became the first American to be given Denmark's Order of Distinguished Merit. The award was presented to recognize his services to that small nation during World War I.

Egan died on January 15, 1924, at the Brooklyn, New York, home of his daughter Mrs. G.A. O'Reilly. While he was eulogized throughout the eastern United States, perhaps the greatest compliments paid to him were those published by the Danish press. Representative of these remarks were the feelings

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[5]Collier's, Vol. 67, No. 13 (March 26, 1921).

[6]Columbia University, June 5, 1919, and St. John's College in June 1920, as reported in New York Times, June 5, 1919, and June 24, 1920. In 1919 he also gave the commencement address at New York University. New York Times, June 19, 1919.

expressed by Copenhagen's Berlingske Tidende:

> It is of the greatest importance to a small country that a great power's Minister demonstrate love and sympathy toward the accredited nation. Such a man was Dr. Egan. His death, therefore, is a personal loss to all of us. It is as though we were mourning one of our own great sons.[7]

Maurice Francis Egan will always be remembered by his relatives as an important man -- close friend of Theodore Roosevelt, prominent Catholic writer, presidential adviser. Historians, however, will undoubtedly only give him honorable mention as a minor American bureaucrat of Irish ancestry who was linked with the United States' acquisition of the Virgin Islands. But all who closely examine his life -- whether they are blood relations or impartial observers -- will understandably wonder how a man who had no political base, who did not represent a block of votes, and who had no favors to give could achieve even the limited success in government which Egan did. After all, whatever limited voter influence he ever may have had ended in 1888 when he quit the Freeman's Journal.

Egan's likable personality was a primary factor in his success, but more than anything else Egan was lucky. He knew the right people -- Richard Watson Gilder, Senator Thomas Carter, Theodore Roosevelt, for example -- in the right places at the right time and was able to capitalize on his

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[7] Berlingske Tidende, January 16, 1924, as quoted in New York Times, January 17, 1924. The Times reported that practically all of the Copenhagen newspapers had articles on the death of "one of Denmark's best friends."

acquaintanceships. His relationship with Roosevelt was particularly crucial to his success. Without the Roosevelt appointment to Denmark, Egan would have remained a witty minor Catholic writer and teacher who was occasionally invited to White House social functions. But Roosevelt, recognizing Egan's ability, gave him the opportunity to enter the diplomatic world and use his skills. Credit for Egan's success must also be given to Secretary of State Lansing, the source of Egan's "ultimate break." Prior to Lansing, no one in the State Department had ever shown the least interest in Egan's efforts to reopen negotiations for the United States' purchase of the Danish West Indies. Within five days after assuming office, however, Lansing had discussed Egan's work with President Wilson, and the two men had given Egan the "go-ahead" to pursue the issue further, thus assuring Egan a place in American history as one of the first Catholic Americans of Irish ancestry to gain some prominence in the service of the federal government.

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The majority of the Egan papers are to be found in the Library of Congress in the Presidential Papers of Cleveland, McKinley, Roosevelt, Taft, and Wilson and in the Archives of the Department of State. For this study, however, the author was forced to rely heavily on the published Papers Relating to the Foreign Relations of the United States and on Egan's Recollections of a Happy Life and Ten Years Near the German Frontier.

Egan's "autobiographies" are primarily rambling reminispences, often hard to follow because he becomes involved in the genealogies of the persons he discusses, but they are the primary sources for information concerning Egan's early life and years prior to his becoming Minister to Denmark. Historians who have written about Egan, i.e. Charles Tansill and Allan Westcott, based their studies on these works even though Egan's writings are frequently inaccurate. Certain of his facts and situations very obviously have been colored to provide more reader interest. Egan was, above all, an entertainer.

The Virgin Islands purchase was thoroughly detailed by Charles Callan Tansill. His monograph and Robert Lansing's article in the New York Times Magazine are the best sources of background information about the purchase fight. The

Papers Relating to Foreign Relations proved to be the best source of data about Egan's part in the negotiations. However, it was the Frankfurter Zeitung und Handelsblatt, extant copies of which were found in the Stadtbibliothek, Mainz, Germany, which helped to substantiate Egan's theory that Germany by 1914 was no longer interested in securing the Danish West Indies for herself.

Arthur Link's volumes on Wilson and the books by Ernest R. May, Palle Lauring, Franklin Scott, and Marion Siney were extremely useful sources of background material about the period Egan served as Minister to Denmark. These books covered in reliable detail Wilson's desire for continued United States neutrality; problems in United States-Danish relations; Denmark's internal difficulties -- political, economic, and social; and the complications which arose between the United States and Denmark when the former entered the War. Egan's declining years were most clearly detailed by the New York Times, 1918-1924.

Throughout this paper there was no problem in researching what Egan thought of himself, but there was a dearth of information about the views his contemporaries had about him and his activities. Such material can be found, however, in the Archives of the University of Notre Dame and Catholic University and especially in the Theodore Roosevelt Papers. Research in these archives would be necessary for a study of greater depth.

BOOKS, ARTICLES, AND POEMS BY

MAURICE FRANCIS EGAN

A complete listing of Egan's works would be a monumental task since his books and contributions to magazines and newspapers extended over the period from 1868 to 1924. Among the more prominent journals he contributed to were: Bookman, Century Magazine, Scribner's, Yale Review, Atlantic Monthly, New York Times Book Review Section, Forum, Review of Reviews, American-Scandinavian Review, Harper's, Outlook, and Ladies Home Journal.

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